





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

---

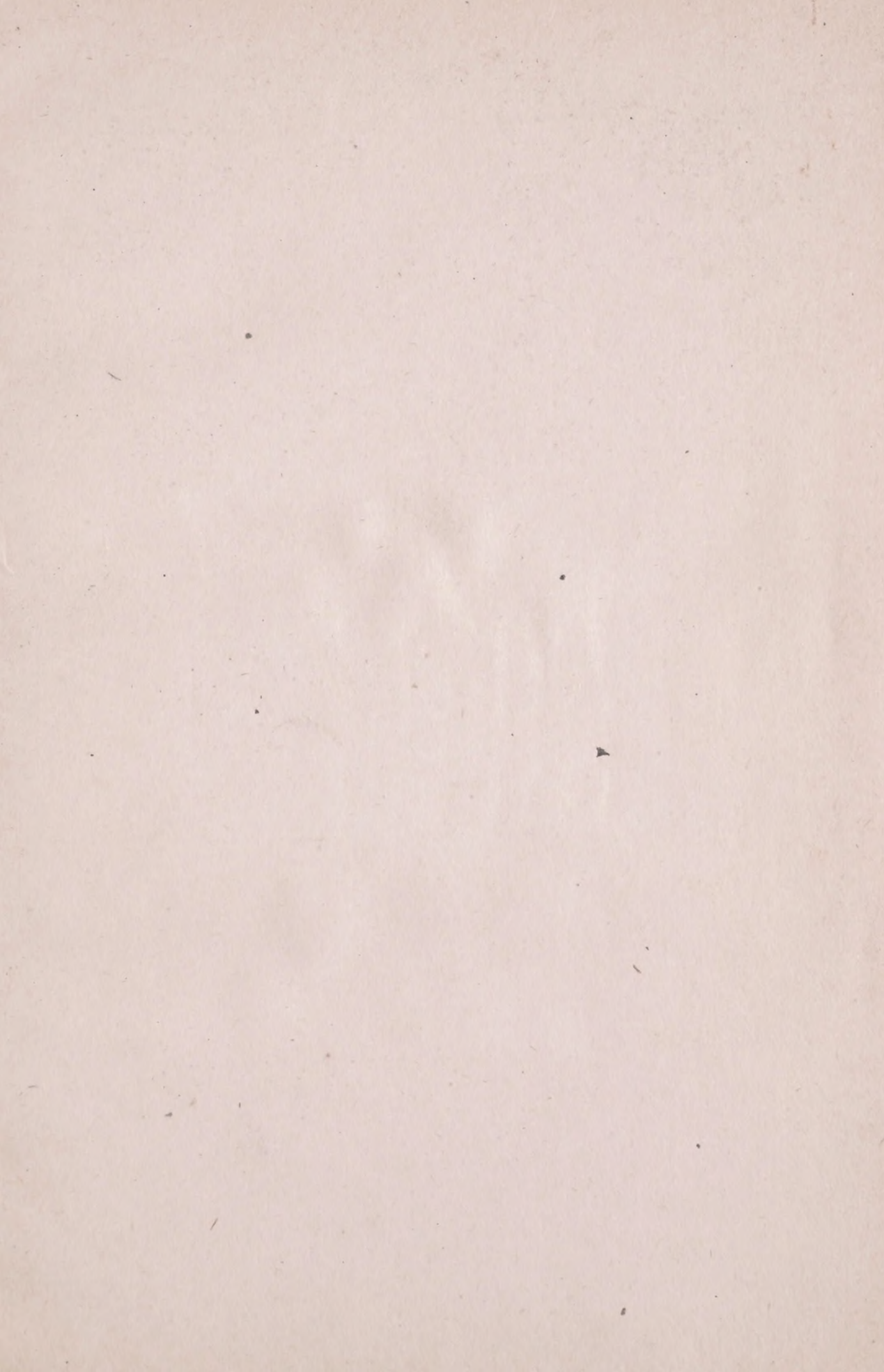
Chap. .... Copyright No. ....

Shelf <sup>PZ3</sup> C734 G

---

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





















Free & Smith's

SELECT  
SERIES.

NOV

GRATIA'S TRIALS  
OR  
BY- LUCY RANDALL  
OWN WAY.  
COMFORT.

LOVE  
IS LORD  
OF ALL

COPYRIGHT.



A  
**KNITTED**  
**SUIT**  
 FOR  
**LENOR** **LENOR**

---

**Misses' and Children's**

FALL AND WINTER WEAR.

**LENOR** Owing to the great success during the past season of their Knitted Tuxedo Summer Suit, Messrs. James McCreery & Co. have been led to produce a Knitted Fall and Winter Suit for Misses and Children, adapted for school and outdoor wear. **LENOR**

This suit is made in one piece; the waist is tight-fitting, with a full front of Jacket effect, and the skirt is made full, with sash.

The colors are the soft, warm Winter Shades, relieved here and there with stripes of contrasting color.

A full descriptive circular mailed on application.

Controlled exclusively and for sale only by

**JAMES MCCREERY & CO.,**

Broadway and 11th St., New York.

**Health and Vigor for the Brain and Nerves.**

**CROSBY'S**

**Vitalized Phosphites.**

For 20 years has been a standard remedy with physicians treating nervous disorders.

**A VITAL PHOSPHITE, NOT A LABORATORY PHOSPHATE.**

The Emperor Dom Pedro, Bismarck, Gladstone, and other brain-workers have cured their nervous prostration, and now maintain their bodily and mental vigor by its occasional use. *It aids in the bodily and wonderfully in the mental growth of children.* It relieves all forms of nervous derangement, lassitude, exhaustion, loss of memory, sleeplessness, irritation, and inability to work or study. College Students who have impaired their faculties can regain their strength by its use.

**F. CROSBY CO., 56 West 25th St., New York.**

For sale by druggists, or by mail \$1, P. O. order, bill, or postage stamps.



STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES—No. 7.

POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES.

ISSUED MONTHLY.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE, \$2.50 PER YEAR.

FEBRUARY, 1888.

# GRATIA'S TRIALS;

OR,

## MAKING HER OWN WAY.

BY

LUCY RANDALL COMFORT,

Author of "Diamond; or, The California Heiress," "Vendetta,"  
"Cecile's Marriage," "Twice an Heiress," etc.

NEW YORK:

STREET & SMITH Publishers,

31 Rose Street.





PZ 3

.C734 G

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1888,  
By STREET & SMITH,  
In the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington, D. C.



# GRATIA'S TRIALS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

The bland October sun had just dipped behind the misty blue of the far-off range of the Catskills ; the sound of the river in the valley seemed unwontedly loud and distinct, as it mingled with the chirp of crickets and the weird cry of the katydid, and the scarlet woodbine-trailers on the south end of the old farm-house shone through the twilight, as if their leaves had been dipped in blood.

It was a curious brown building, that same farm-house, with a high, steep roof, that descended so low as almost to touch the top of the door in front, and formed curious architectural angles in the rear, while an immense stone chimney rose out of its center, and gray plastered squares marked the locality of the kitchen fire-place, and the cavern-like oven at its side. Two huge clusters of box grew on either side of the door-yard path, and the little wooden gate was shaded by a single maple tree.

A tall girl of fifteen stood leaning over the gate, her hair blown away from her face by the chill evening wind, her cheeks glowing with peach-like color, and her brown eyes almost veiled by their white, drooping lids, whose long lashes were just a shade darker than her auburn tresses. Her dress, of some brown material, was coarse in texture and unattractive in color,



but she wore a late autumn rose at her throat, and a bow of bright ribbon was tied at the left side of her head. She was not pretty, any more than the half-opened bud is pretty, but there was that in her face and figure which gave promise of extraordinary beauty in the future.

This was Gratia Kempfield.

As she stood there, looking dreamily out, where the orange sky was slowly deepening into wine-red, a little hand pulled gently at her skirt, and a tiny voice piped out :

“Gratia ! Sister !”

“Is it you, Raymond ?” and the elder sister put her arm caressingly round the five-year-old boy, who had crept out into the twilight as noiselessly as the kitten that frisked by his side.

“I thought you were by the kitchen fire.”

“So I was, but *she* came out, with a basin, to make some gruel, and she kissed me and patted my head. I don’t like her, Gratia ! When is she going away ?”

“I don’t know,” said Gratia, speaking with something of an effort.

“I want my mamma again !” pleaded little Raymond, with a sob in his throat. “I don’t like Cousin Almira. When will mamma be well again, Gratia ?”

The young girl stooped and lifted the child in her arms, while she imprinted a kiss on his sunburnt forehead.

“Dear Raymond, when God pleases. Be a good boy, and don’t tease.”

Gratia put her little brother down on the short, crisp grass once more, and, turning silently, went into the house.

The wide kitchen was all still, save for the noisy chirping of crickets under the hearth-stones ; the fire, of great moss-fringed logs, blazed drowsily on the iron fire-dogs, and the bed of live coals below glowed and deepened like a mass of melted topaz and rubies ; but Gratia saw a man’s figure sitting by the table, in a chair tipped back against the wall—a man whose face would have been pleasant enough, save for a certain weakness



in the lower jaw, which seemed to recede under its fringe of scanty yellow beard, and an expression of habitual irritability in the light-blue eyes. He sat in his shirt-sleeves, cool as was the evening, and his heavy cowhide boots bore red traces of the soil in which he had been laboring all day long.

"Where have you been, Gratia?" asked Farmer Kempfield, querulously. "The milk isn't strained yet, and I've been calling you until I'm as hoarse as a crow."

"I thought you paid Cousin Almira for doing such things," said Gratia, biting her lip.

"Almira has all she can do, and more too, said Mr. Kempfield, "in waiting on your mother."

"Then why doesn't she let me help her?"

"'Tain't your place to ask questions, Gratia," returned Mr. Kempfield, as if he resented the young girl's words. "Almira's right. I hain't brought you children up in the fear of the Fifth Commandment as I'd ought to; but you know well enough without my tellin' you, why there don't nobody but Almira go into the south room. It's for fear of infection."

"I am not afraid!" flashed out Gratia. "Oh, father! if they would only let me see mamma—just once!"

"Don't be unreasonable!" said Ira Kempfield, with the sharpness of a shallow nature. "Go and see to the milk; it's your duty to do all you can to help Cousin Almira."

"Father," said Gratia, still lingering, "why did she send Bridget Meara away? I am not strong enough to lift those heavy pails."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Kempfield, moving uneasily in his chair. "Almira allows 'twon't hurt you to work a little like other folks' gals. Bridget Meara was a wasteful creetur'. Almira says I hain't no idea how much she saves by doin' the work herself."

"By letting *me* do it, she means!" burst out Gratia. "I wish Almira Bassett would mind her own business."

"Tut! tut!" cried Mr. Kempfield. "I can't have no such



ungrateful talk as that ; Almira does more than half a dozen girls."

"She gets well paid for it !" retorted Gratia, bitterly.

"There's some things money can't pay for," said the farmer.

"She is a sly, disagreeable old maid," went on Gratia, hotly, "and mamma never liked to have her here, when——"

She checked herself abruptly, for, chancing to turn her head, she saw a short figure close behind her ; and caught the basilisk gleam of Miss Almira Bassett's Chinese-lidded eyes, that looked like two gray slits in her face.

Miss Bassett might have been thirty, or she might have been forty. She was one of those well-preserved old maids at whose age no one can make an exact guess. She was soft-stepping and soft-voiced, with thick lips and a flat nose, and a skin deeply pitted with pock-marks, while her thick black hair shone like satin on either side of its parting, and she habitually wore a black velvet band around her somewhat thick throat, and skirts which scarcely rustled as she walked.

"Gratia, dear," she said, in a persuasive, oleaginous voice, "would you mind getting in a little fresh, cool water from the well ? Your poor dear pa is tired to death, and I can't leave your ma—she's more light-headed than usual to-night, poor thing, or I would go myself."

"Doe *she* want it ?" asked Gratia.

"To be sure she does," said Miss Bassett. "I should not have mentioned it for *myself*, you may rest assured."

Gratia caught up the cedar pail which usually stood on a wooden bench by the kitchen door, and scudded away to the well, just beyond the garden wall. She came back presently, breathless and panting, from the haste which she had made.

A minute or two afterward, when Almira Bassett's noiseless footsteps glided across the little hall which formed a sort of quarantine between the sick-room and the rest of the house, Gratia crept after her like a shadow.

Although it was not yet dark out of doors, a dull light was



burning in the sick-room, and Gratia could just see a death-white face tossing to and fro in a sea of pillows, and catch the low, monotonous sound of a moaning voice.

“Mamma !” she cried, catching her breath with a quick gasp.

“Gratia, my child !”

The gladness of those tones ; the sudden brightening of the face ; the hands groping wildly about, as if for the warm clasp of her fingers ; Gratia Kempfield never forgot those things while she lived. It was but for a second, however, and then Almira Bassett, flinging to the ground the cup of water she carried, rushed forward and thrust Gratia by main force out of the room.

“Child, are you crazy ?” she shrieked, her own face nearly as white as that of the sick woman. “Ira Kempfield !” she continued, as the astonished farmer came forward in a lumbering sort of way, “I swear to you that if ever this happens again I will leave your house within half an hour.”

“It’s my mother !” gasped Gratia, struggling to escape from Miss Bassett’s wonderfully strong grasp. “Who should be by her bedside, if not I ? I *will* go to her !”

Almira’s eyes blazed defiance.

“Ira Kempfield,” she panted, “decide between us. Am I to nurse your wife, or is Gratia ?”

“I believe the gal is out of her head,” said Farmer Kempfield, beginning gradually to comprehend the exigencies of the case. “Gratia, go about your business, and don’t let this ’ere be repeated, or I’ll know the reason why. I’m ashamed o’ you, arter all Cousin Almira’s kindness. Ask her forgiveness this instant.”

“I will not,” uttered Gratia, in low, husky tones.

Mr. Kempfield seized his daughter’s arm, as if he would have shaken the demanded words out of her firmly set lips ; but Miss Bassett interfered, smiling and sweet-voiced again as ever.

“Don’t be hard on the child, Cousin Ira. I really shouldn’t have spoken quite so sharply myself, only you see it was running



a terrible risk, and I feel myself responsible to you. "You'll kiss and be friends, Gratia, dear, won't you?"

"I do b'lieve you're the nearest approach to an angel of any woman I ever see, Almira," said Mr. Kempfield, admiringly.

But Gratia shuddered as the soft, warm, wet lips touched her cheek, and her heart cried out:

"Judas! Judas!"

---

## CHAPTER II.

### IN THE SICK-ROOM.

When Miss Bassett returned from the brief verbal skirmish with Gratia Kempfield, in which the latter had been so signally vanquished, she found her charge singularly excited and nervous.

"Gratia!" faltered the sick woman, turning her hollow eyes from side to side, and stretching out her wasted hands. "Gratia, don't leave me now. Take me away. Don't let *her* stay here!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Miss Bassett, leisurely drawing the bolt across the door, and lowering the window which had stood a few inches ajar. "You may just as well stop that palaver. Gratia isn't here, nor she won't be either."

"For one minute, Almira," moaned the feeble voice. "Let me see her for just one minute!"

Almira Bassett sat down before the fire as unconcerned as if no word had been spoken.

"Almira!" pleaded the faint, hesitating voice. "Almira!"

"*What!*" suddenly snarled Miss Bassett, turning round with a start. "Can't I ever have a minute's peace, for your clatter? Ain't it enough that my sleep is broken, and my appetite spoiled, and my constitution half ruined by your whims, but you must keep fret, fret, worry, worry, the whole time? I tell you a saint couldn't stand it. Lie down and keep quiet, Mary



Kempfield, or, as sure as I sit here, I'll give you something to fret for ! Do you hear ? Lie down !"

Mrs. Kempfield sank down in the bed with a quick, apprehensive movement.

"But, Almira," she ventured after a minute or two of silence, "she is my daughter."

"No need to tell me that," said Almira, shrugging her shoulders derisively. "You're as like as two peas. I'd just like to have the training of her—and I will have it, too, after you're out of the way. Here's your draught—take it now, and let's have no fiddle-faddling !"

"It is not time yet—for an hour."

"Take it, or I'll pour it down your throat !" snapped Miss Bassett. "It's *my* time, anyhow. I'm not going to be waked out of a peaceful nap to give it to you, by and by, when the fit takes you."

Mrs. Kempfield swallowed the nauseous dose in meek submissiveness.

"It is bitter—so bitter !" she said, shuddering. "It doesn't taste like the other draughts."

"Suppose it doesn't," said the old maid, indifferently, "who do you suppose is going to be responsible for your capriciousness ? It is the same, and that's enough for you to know."

"Can't I have a little swallow of water ?" asked Mrs. Kempfield. "It tastes like gall in my throat."

"No, you can't," said Almira, who had just established herself in the comfortable arm-chair by the fire, with her feet on a footstool. "I've sat down, and I sha'n't move for any one. I guess you'll keep !"

As she spoke she reached up to the mantel above for a little bottle half full of some dark fluid, labeled "laudanum," with a quick, guilty glance around the room, and deposited it safely in the depths of her large pocket.

Mrs. Kempfield, feebly wringing her thin, emaciated hands,



that told of long illness, lay quite silent now, except for the occasional low sob that shook her attenuated frame.

It must have been fully fifteen minutes afterward that a subdued tap came to the door of the room. Moving like a well-conditioned black cat, Miss Bassett answered the summons, and beheld a tall, elderly man, in spectacles, and a shabby suit of black—a man whose shoulders were bowed, as if with much stooping over sick-beds, and whose kindly, near-sighted eyes had watched the off-flitting of many a ransomed soul in their time.

He looked searchingly down at the pale, sharp face, whose yellow-whiteness was so different from the white of the daintily bleached pillow-cases, and lifted the slender wrist to feel the pulse.

"Four higher than it ought to be," said Dr. Moseley, looking at his big, silver-cased watch. "Anything happened to worry her, eh?"

"Oh, dear, no, doctor!" exclaimed Miss Bassett, in a tone of injured innocence. "What should worry her, with *me* in the room?"

"Well, I don't know," said the doctor, meditatively, feeling his chin; "but I can't tell how else to account for this sudden acceleration of the pulse since morning."

He stooped and inhaled the feeble breath.

"She—she never has been an opium eater?"

"Oh, dear, no, sir."

"There's no laudanum or paregoric where she could get to it?"

Miss Bassett winced slightly, but so slightly that no one would have observed it, as she answered:

"Certainly not, doctor."

"Miss Bassett," said the doctor, "this is a very critical case. I shall change the treatment. Let her have these powders every half hour," he continued, folding up sundry little mounds of gray, ash-like dust in papers. "Waking or sleeping, don't



miss the minute. Keep her perfectly quiet ; humor her in whatever she wants, and if, by the time I come in to-morrow morning, she isn't better, there will be no use in my coming here any more."

As the doctor crossed the hall, on his way out, he met Ira Kempfield.

"What do you think to-night, doctor?" asked the farmer, wistfully ; for he was human, after all, and Mary Kempfield had been the cherished wife of his youth.

"Shall I tell you what I think, or what I hope?" asked Dr. Moseley, sadly.

"What you *think*, of course."

"Well, then, I give you no hope."

"Doctor !"

"I know it's hard, Kempfield," said the doctor, with a husky sound in his voice. "You remember the old saying, 'While there is life, there is hope.' Think of that, and don't quite despair."

"Can't I go to her?" wailed the strong man, sinking down on a chair, with his hands clasped over his face.

"It would hardly be advisable. She seems to know no one, and Miss Bassett appears an excellent nurse, though I must say I didn't quite like her face at first."

"She's the best creatur' that ever lived !" burst out Ira. "I don't know how we'd ever ha' got along without Almira."

The doctor went out, softly shutting the door behind him ; but their dialogue had had an auditor of whom neither was aware. Gratia Kempfield, leaning over the stair-way above, had heard it all.

"No hope !" she repeated to herself, while her lips seemed to grow hard and dry like brass—"no hope ! Oh, Father in heaven, has it come to that ?"

Meanwhile, Almira Bassett, rocking to and fro in her arm-chair, was sinking into a comfortable dose, from which she was



roused by the clock striking eight and Mrs. Kempfield's voice, at one and the same time.

"Almira, I am cold ; will you spread another blanket over me ?"

"Cold !" echoed Miss Bassett ; "and your head and hands feeling like fire ! However, there's blankets enough. *I* don't care."

And she tossed a heavy chintz comforter on the bed as she spoke.

"There now ! Have you any more fault to find ?" asked Miss Bassett, in an injured tone, as she dropped into the fire one of the powders the doctor had left.

As the half-hours went by, Almira Bassett burned the little gray powders one by one, watching them blaze up with a sleepy gleam in her black eyes like the light emitted from a panther's eyeballs.

"Better so," she murmured to herself ; "better so."

It was some time after midnight when she rose and went to the door to get a stick of wood to replenish the dying fire. As she stepped out into the hall, where the wood-box was kept, she started back with a smothered cry, for close to the angle of the door-way stood a slender figure, all in white, like a ghost.

"Gratia !"

For it was Gratia, waiting and listening, with a deadly chill at her heart.

"What on earth are you doing here, child ?" demanded the old maid. "Go to bed right off, or I'll call your pa."

Gratia disdained to answer ; she only turned and glided away. But she did not go to bed ; when the gray dawn rose above the mountains she was still sitting on the stairs, waiting and listening.



## CHAPTER III.

## THE QUILTING PARTY SURPRISED.

The next day dawned clear, soft, and radiant.

Mrs. Deacon Playfair, who lived in the big yellow house across the road, congratulated herself that the weather was so auspicious for her quilting bee.

A quilting bee in the country is synonymous with a "reception" in the city, only more sensible, in that there actually is something done besides exchanging hollow compliments, and criticising one another's toilets among the fair guests.

By two o'clock the preparations were all complete, and the long supper-table, spread with snow-white damask and piles of napkins, was ready for the last touches. Mrs. Playfair and Phoebe Ann, her daughter, had excelled themselves in cake and jelly, dulcet creams, and raised biscuit.

At three o'clock the quilt was finely under weigh, the center of a nucleus of thrifty neighbors, whose needles and tongues wagged in chorus, and the principal topic of discussion was the shadow hanging over the opposite house.

Mrs. Playfair was seated near the door, which stood wide open to admit the yellow flood of the afternoon sunshine, when she chanced to look up. A gray shadow crept over her face, the features suddenly became drawn and rigid, and she started to her feet with a shriek.

"Hush!" she cried. "Look there! What is that?"

Mrs. Playfair beheld a sight which turned the blood in her veins to a cold tide of terror—Mary Kempfield, death-pale and ghastly, standing in the door-way, her hands clasping the side-post, as if for support, and her dark hair streaming wildly down over her white night-dress.



“Merciful father !” cried Mrs. Playfair ; she’s dead, and it’s her ghost !”

Mary Kempfield turned her wild, hollow eyes to the speaker, and seemed to strive for utterance, as the neighbors, rushing forward, gathered round to help support her reeling form.

“What is it, Mary ?” cried Mrs. Waring. “What is it you have to tell us ?”

There was a rattle in the dying woman’s throat—a husky whisper on her lips—but that was all.

The next instant Gratia Kempfield was kneeling on the floor beside her mother, crying out :

“Mamma ! mamma !”

And Miss Bassett, hot and flushed with the haste she had made, ran into the room, mingled terror and defiance in her face.

“What has she said ?” she shrieked. “What has she told you ?”

---

## CHAPTER IV.

### AFTER THE FUNERAL.

Even as Miss Bassett spoke, the seal seemed to be removed from the dying woman’s lips.

“Gratia !” she uttered. “My children—Gratia !”

And that was the last word that Mary Kempfield ever spoke.

While they were lifting the stiff form, Almira Bassett looked from one to the other with fierce, hungry eyes.

“Why don’t you tell me what it was ?” she said, with her hand preessed tight to her fat white throat, as if to repress some upsurging emotion. “Of course she was only raving ; you all know that she is delirious. Tell me—I am not afraid. You know they turn against their best friends when—when the fever fit is on ’em.”



"Land's sake!" said Mrs. Howe, "you needn't to be so scairt, Miss Bassett—you heerd all we did."

"Is that all?" said Miss Almira, breathing quick and fast. "I didn't know but that she'd been talkin' nonsense. Poor dear! I had just stepped into the kitchen to see about a little warm water—I couldn't have been gone two minutes—and when I came back the doors were all open, and she was gone. Mercy, what a start it gave me!"

And hurrying forward, she bent over the bed where they had laid the victim of her cruel treachery.

"Gratia, don't get so close to your ma—she can't catch her breath," she said, reproachfully.

"It don't matter, whispered Mrs. Waring, drawing her gently back. "Hush! don't tell the poor child yet; she'll never breathe again in this world."

So ended Mrs. Deacon Playfair's quilting party.

The windows were closed in the Kempfield farm-house; the green paper blinds were rigidly drawn down, to exclude all the light and sunshine that was practicable; people came and went on tiptoe, especially as they passed the room where the corpse lay, all robed in white, with a cluster of tuberose in its cold fingers, and one watcher, sitting tirelessly beside the pillow.

"What makes you cry so hard, Gratia?" asked Raymond, coming in, and stroking her face with his soft palm. "Are you going to die, too? Mrs. Playfair says you will."

"I wish I could!" moaned Gratia, the hot tears streaming down over her little brother's hands; "oh, I only wish I could!"

"And leave me, Gratia?"

She clasped the child close to her heart.

"You are right, darling; I had forgotten; I have you to live for yet. If *she* could speak she would tell me so. Come and look at her Raymond."

She led the little boy to the coffin. He stood on tiptoe to touch the cold temple of his dead mother.



"Who is it, Gratia?" he whispered, clinging to her skirts, and looking up with awe-stricken eyes.

"Mamma," she answered.

"No, it isn't. Mamma would love me and kiss me. Mamma was not as white, and still, and cold. Gratia, what have they done with my mamma?"

And kneeling there beside the bier of her dead mother, Gratia Kempfield tried to explain to her little brother the awful riddle and mystery of death.

Meanwhile Ira Kempfield, sitting at his fireside in a sort of enforced idleness, more embarrassed than otherwise by the visits of condolence of his friends and neighbors, twirled his brown, toil-hardened fingers round and round, and felt dimly that some great calamity had overtaken him. He had no care or trouble to assume—Miss Bassett took all that upon her own shoulders; he felt her presence was a relief and a blessing.

"I don't know what I should ever have done if it hadn't been for her," he kept saying. "I don't know what would become of me if she wasn't here now."

"Gratia," said little Raymond, soberly, to his sister, as they were coming home, hand in hand, from the dreary village church-yard, where the nettles, and burdock, and trailing blackberry vines had been cleared away to make a grave for Ira Kempfield's wife, "will they put you and me in big holes in the church-yard like that when we die?"

"I suppose so, Raymond," his sister answered, scarcely heeding his words.

"Then I don't want ever to die!"

"Listen, dear," said Gratia; "it is dark and dismal there now, but we will make it a beautiful flower garden. We will come there every day, and work. We will make her grave fair and bright with the autumn blossoms."

Thus she spoke, thinking inwardly, "At all events, the child shall not learn to have a fear and horror of his mother's grave."



Mrs. Deacon Playfair thought it was very odd that Mr. Kempfield walked to and from his wife's grave with Miss Almira Bassett, a moving mass of crape and bombazine, upon his arm.

"He'd ought to have gone with his daughter," she said, shaking her head. "It looked too forlorn for anything to see them two poor children stragglin' along behind, like lost lambs."

But Mrs. Playfair had not observed the maneuver by which Miss Almira rustled up to the widower's side and slipped her hand through his arm, in the momentary confusion of leaving first the house, and then the grave.

Ira Kempfield himself had been a little startled by the boldness of the *coup d'état*, but he took it for granted that it was all right and proper, or Almira would not have done it.

Gratia was standing by the window, when the maple leaves were slowly drifting down, when Raymond came soberly up to her that afternoon.

"What are you eating, Ray?" she asked, scarcely thinking what she said. "Have you found some ripe chestnuts?"

"No," said Raymond, with his little round cherry of a mouth full of something. "Cousin Almira gave me some candies. I picked up a basket of chips for her to kindle the fire, and she gave me all these. See!"

"Give them to me," said Gratia, contracting her brows, and holding out her hands. "You know, Ray, the doctor said candies weren't good for you."

The child jerked himself backward with a quick, impatient movement.

"No!" he ejaculated, stamping one tiny foot.

"Give them to me this instant!" said Gratia, trying to take the obnoxious *bonbons* from the little fellow by main force. He set up a piteous outcry, and Miss Almira came in from the kitchen,



"What is it, darling? Who is hurting my little motherless lamb?"

"No one is hurting him," said Gratia, doing her best to preserve her temper. "He is eating these colored candies, and his stomach is so delicate."

"La! is that all?" said Miss Almira. "What nonsense! All children eat candy."

"Raymond is not like all children," said Gratia. "He is subject to fits, and the doctor says we must never let him have anything of the kind."

"They won't hurt him," said Miss Bassett. "Do let the poor little fellow have them. There, there, Raymond, dear, don't cry—you shall have your candy."

"She is taking *his* love away from me, too," Gratia thought. "Oh, what shall I do? What have I worth living for? Oh, mamma, mamma!"

The tears that streamed down her cheeks relieved her in some measure; the cool air against her fevered cheek seemed almost like the touch of a tender hand, and suddenly a little voice sounded on her ear:

"Gratia! sister! lift up your head! I don't care much for the candies. I won't eat any more if you don't want me to."

And Gratia hugged the little nestling form up in her arms, feeling that they two were left all alone in the world together.

"You mustn't stay out here in the cold, dear," she said, after a minute or two.

"Won't you just go up to the top of the hill with me, Gratia?" pleaded the little boy, "to see if there any sweet wild grapes on the stone fence by the lane?"

"Come, then," said Gratia, holding out her hand, with a smile.

When they stopped, breathless and ruddy-cheeked, at the top of the hill, Raymond looked wistfully up into his sister's face.



"Gratia," said he, "what does it mean to have a new mother?"

"A new mother!"

"Yes. How can we have a new mother? *Our* mother is dead."

"Of course she is, Raymond. What do you mean?"

"I heard Mrs. Playfair whisper it to Miss Pemberton at the funeral."

"Whisper *what*, Raymond?"

"Why, she said I should have a new mother pretty soon. How can I, Gratia?"

Gratia felt a cold chill run through her veins that was not the frosty sweep of the evening wind rustling the vine-leaves at her side.

Miss Almira was at the door when the two children returned, and through the open portal they could see the cheerful gleam of the firelight as it played on the glass and china of the ready-spread tea-table.

"They've come at last," said she to Ira Kempfield, who sat inside, staring thoughtfully at the fire. "Gratia, dear, you shouldn't have that child out so late, with his tendency to croup."

"It will not hurt him," said Gratia, shortly.

"You don't know that," said Miss Almira, reproachfully, drawing the little boy to the fire. "Mercy, me! how cold his precious hands are! He shall sit on Cousin Almira's lap and warm them."

Gratia turned away. She could not bear to see Raymond in-folded in the caresses of the woman she most disliked of any one on earth. But Mr. Kempfield's gaze rested admiringly on the tableau.

"I'm sure I don't know how we shall ever pay you for all your kindness to me and the children, Almira," he said.



## CHAPTER V.

## THE PROPHECY FULFILLED.

It was a chilly afternoon in December, with now and then a snow-flake floating ominously through the gray quietness of the air, and the cattle huddling together under the shelter of a shed or thatching, as if apprehensive of coming tempest, when Gratia Kempfield sat sewing by the kitchen window.

"I am so tired," she thought—"oh, so tired!"

And well might she be. There was no thoughtful mother-care now to plan, to anticipate, and to contrive for her—no one to watch her lest the young cheek should pale with fatigue, or the light figure droop beneath the burdens laid prematurely upon it.

The clock struck four as Mr. Kempfield came in with a huge armful of wood which he threw with a crash on the kitchen hearth, and Gratia seized the opportunity to broach a subject that had long lain very close to her heart.

"Father," she began, hesitatingly—"father, may I go to school this winter?"

"What for?" said Mr. Kempfield, gruffly. "Ain't there enough to do at home?"

"Mother always wanted me to have a little more schooling," said Gratia, in a choked voice.

"You've had as much as most gals now," said her father. "You don't seem to calculate that you've got to work for a livin'."

"Yes, I do, father!" cried Gratia, eagerly, "and that's the very reason I want to go to school a little longer. I would like to qualify myself to be a teacher."

"I don't see as you can be spared," said Mr. Kempfield, uneasily. "Almira needs you to help about the house."



"Is she going to stay here all winter, father?" asked Gratia, in despairing accents.

"Why shouldn't she?" said Mr. Kempfield, striking the blazing log with the poker, so as to send showers of bright sparks up the chimney. But he did not look his daughter in the face. "And you'll be wanted to help round."

"But before and after school I could do a great deal, father," urged Gratia.

"You've just got to be contented as you be," said Mr. Kempfield. "Almira says you're old enough to be as much use as a woman, if you only had a mind to. And Almira calculates——"

"I don't want to hear what *she* says, father," said Gratia, biting her lips. "I ask *your* permission."

"Well, you won't get it," said Mr. Kempfield, with asperity. "And see here, Gracia, you've got to behave different to Almira Bassett."

"Has she been complaining to you, father?"

"N-no ; I've got eyes and ears of my own. You don't treat her decent. You'd ought to know that she stands in a mother's place to you, and ——"

But Gratia started up, hot and panting.

"No, father, not *that!* Never *that!* No one ever can stand in *her* place, least of all a mean, meddlesome, intriguing old maid like Almira Bassett. I owe her neither love nor respect."

Mr. Kempfield dropped his poker, and stood aghast. Then, without a word of comment, he uttered a low, long whistle, and left the room.

Gratia Kempfield staid patiently at home the next day, to look after the late tea-dinner. Little Raymond was ill and feverish—he had overeaten of cake and candy during a visit to the village with Almira Bassett the day previous—and he, too, had to be taken care of, so that his sister's Sunday was by no means a day of rest. After dinner she made her usual pilgrimage to her mother's grave with a single pink rosebud, gathered from the



monthly rose in the kitchen window that had once been her mother's pet and pride. She had not judged it best to take Raymond with her ; but Miss Bassett opined sweetly, that "a little walk would do the darling good—she, for one, didn't believe in overmuch cosseting !" And Raymond was tired and cross, and Gratia had to carry him nearly all the way home in her slender arms, so that when they reached the farm fence she was heartily rejoiced.

"Who is that coming out of the door ?" she exclaimed. "An old gentleman !"

"It's the minister !" said Raymond.

"Nonsense !" cried Gratia. "What should the minister be coming to our house for on Sunday afternoon ?"

She quickened her footsteps as she spoke.

"Yes, it is the minister," she added. "Perhaps he has come to see why we are not more regular in our attendance at church. I cannot tell him it is because Almira Bassett makes me stay at home and cook the dinner."

Old Mr. Vaughan was well out of sight before Gratia entered the kitchen. There were no lights yet, but the blazing logs gave a sufficient illumination to the room. Mr. Kempfield was leaning over his cousin Almira's chair, holding her hand ; Gratia looked from one to the other in astonishment.

"Raymond," said the farmer, avoiding the reproachful lightning of his daughter's glance, "come here and kiss your new mamma !"

Raymond stood still in amazement.

"Mamma is dead," he said. "Mamma is in the churchyard !"

"Yes, darling," said Almira, sweetly ; but that was your old mamma. *I* am your mother now, you sweet precious !"

"Must I call you mamma ?" asked the child, doubtfully.



"Of course you must!" said Mr. Kempfield, authoritatively.

Raymond glanced timidly at his sister, as if her sanction were needful to this new state of affairs.

"Father!" cried Gratia, with a stifling lump rising in her throat, and a sudden sensation as if all the blood in her pulses were turned to stinging pins and needles, "is this true?"

"I was married to her half an hour ago," said Mr. Kempfield, doggedly.

Gratia looked at Almira, and the slant light of triumph flashed from her narrow eyes, in spite of the middle-aged bride's affected meekness. Almira had conquered, and both felt that it was so.

"Why don't you speak to your mother!" said Mr. Kempfield.

"She is not my mother," said Gratia, huskily. "*My* mother has not yet been buried three months."

Ira Kempfield felt the reproach keenly—it made him angry.

"You *shall* speak to Almira," he said, almost savagely, "or you are no daughter of mine."

"My *dear* Mr. Kempfield," smoothly interposed the bride, "you are so hasty. Remember how sudden this must seem to the children. Wait a little, and dear Gratia and I will be the best of friends."

There was a moment or two of dead silence, and then Mrs. Kempfield took Raymond on her lap, and began kissing and petting him ostentatiously.

*You'll* love me, darling, won't you?" she cooed. "*You'll* call me mother?"

"But you aren't mother," said the child. "You are Cousin Almira."

"Just hear the dear little fellow, Ira," laughed the bride.



“Isn't he smart? Well, sweet, and can't 'Cousin Almira' be 'mamma' too?”

“That was what Mrs. Playfair meant,” said Raymond, meditatively, as he sat on his step-mother's lap, swinging his little red-stockinged legs in the glow of the chestnut logs.

“What, dearie?”

“Why, when my first mamma was buried, she said I should have a new mother pretty soon.”

This inopportune speech was followed by another silence, and then Mrs. Kempfield put Raymond down, with a little affected laugh.

“Run up stairs, dear, and take off your wet shoes,” she said, “and then, Gratia, we'll have tea.”

Miss Almira Bassett had been bad enough about the house, but Mrs. Kempfield was ten times worse. Gratia's frank, honest nature never could have conceived beforehand what an amount of malicious mischief one woman could do; and it was all so skillfully wrought that Ira Kempfield firmly believed his new wife to be an angel through everything.

Under pretense of teaching Gratia the details of housekeeping, she made a mere kitchen drudge of her; under the specious vail of firmness and discipline, she treated little Raymond with a subtle cruelty that made his sister's blood boil within her.

“If it were not for Raymond,” she thought, again and again, when most keenly stung with the envenomed darts of her step-mother's malice, “I would go away, and never look upon her face again.”

Perhaps—although Gratia did not fully comprehend her step-mother's policy—that might have been precisely what Mrs. Kempfield desired.



## CHAPTER VI.

## THE STEP-MOTHER.

“Father!”

Mr. Kempfield was in the harness-shed, mending a much-worn strap, with a bunch of waxed-ends on the bench beside him, and the awl between his teeth, when Gratia stood before him, her auburn hair blown about by the wind, and her hazel eyes sparkling with a vividness that roused his dull senses into something akin to amazement.

“Eh?” said Mr. Kempfield, dropping the awl, and straightening himself up. “What’s amiss now?”

“She—your wife—is moving little Raymond’s things up into the east garret chamber. Is he to be turned out of his room to suit her whims?”

“It does seem to me, Gratia, that you *want* to make mischief,” said Ira Kempfield, feebly. “Your mother needs the room for her own things.”

“Are there not enough other rooms in the house?” indignantly demanded Gratia.

“Yes, but she wants *that* room; and Raymond’ll do just as well in the garret. I ain’t one that believes in this everlasting cosseting and coddling.”

“But, father, the roof leaks, and you can see daylight through the cracks in the siding.”

“Well, what then?” said Mr. Kempfield. “When I was a boy we lived in a log-cabin, and I slept up chamber with the other children, and many a winter’s mornin’ we used to wake up with the snow drifted over us from the cracks in the ruff. I ain’t any the wuss for it, be I?”

“But Raymond was never strong, father,” pleaded Gratia.



"That's just it," said Ira Kempfield, complacently. "Almira says he only needs a little toughening off to be just like other boys."

"Father," cried Gratia, passionately, "I do believe that woman has bewitched you. Have you lost all care and tenderness for mamma's little sickly boy, the last of the flock? Oh, father, I never could have believed it of you."

Ira Kempfield stood momentarily confounded; but as he was slowly opening his lips to reply, his second wife came smilingly into the shed.

"Ira, dear, come to supper," she said. "I've baked a pan of waffles, just as you like 'em. And I wish you would speak to Raymond; he has been behaving very naughty—very naughty indeed."

"I don't believe it!" cried Gratia, impulsively.

"That's so like you, Gratia," sighed her step-mother, with the patient, resigned smile of an ill-treated serf. "You never had an idea of discipline. And Raymond is just exactly like you."

"What's he been a-doin' of?" asked the farmer, with his eyes fixed admiringly on the serene face of his second wife.

"He struck at me, and tried to bite me, and called me a nasty, mean thing. Don't look so vexed, Ira, please; I don't mind it—I would endure a great deal more for *your* sake, dear."

"I'll teach him!" said Ira Kempfield, with a dark-red flush coming to his brow; "I'll learn him he ain't to ride rough-shod over the whole house, the ill-tempered little monkey."

He strode fiercely away to the house, leaving Gratia and her step-mother looking each other in the face.

"Well, young lady," said Mrs. Kempfield, triumphantly, for all vail of shallow pretense had long since fallen from between them. "I hope this will make you understand that



you and your precious little brother aren't going to have your own way in *everything*."

"I admire the generosity and magnanimity of the game you are playing, madam," said Gratia, in a voice of stifled bitterness. "I only wonder you are not afraid of being haunted by the ghost of that poor baby's dead mother."

Mrs. Kempfield started, and looked uneasily round, as if she half expected to see some white spectral shadow hovering behind her. It was plain that Gracia's words smote upon some vulnerable spot in her armor of arrogance and selfish coldness.

"Hold you tongue, miss!" she cried, tartly. "I won't take any more of your impudence! You're too big to whip, more's the pity, but I'll have you shut up in the garret for a week on bread and water, if you dare to speak to me so again. Your father will do it, as quick as wink, if I tell him to!"

Alas! Gratia knew that her step-mother's vaunt was but too true; and without a word, she turned toward the house. As she entered the door, the sound of low sobbing met her ears.

"Where is Raymond, father?" she asked of Mr. Kempfield, who sat staring defiantly into the kitchen fire, with his hands on his knees.

"I've locked him up in the lumber-room," the farmer answered. "I ain't goin' to have this sort of thing going on no longer, and the sooner he understands it, the better for him!"

Gratia felt, rather than saw, the malicious lightnings quiver in her step-mother's eyes, as she silently passed her on her way up stairs to the lumber-room door, whence proceeded the mournful sounds of her little brother's wailings.

"Raymond, darling!" she whispered, kneeling on the floor, with her cheek close against the panels, "don't cry so hard; I'm here—Gratia. Tell me all about it, and don't sob so loud."



"He beat me," whimpered Raymond, through his tears ; "he shook me, and beat me, sister—and I'm to have no supper !"

Gratia was silent for a moment.

"What was it all about, Raymond ?" she asked, at length.

"I asked her to let me carry up the birds' nests and stones, and things that my own mamma arranged on the shelves for me, 'cause I didn't want *her* to touch them."

"But you did not tell her that ?"

"No ; I only asked her to please let me take them up stairs in the little covered basket that Phœbe Ann gave me. And she caught them all in her apron, and said they were only rubbish, and she was going to throw them out of the window."

"And then, Raymond ?" questioned his sister, breathlessly.

"I 'most forget, Gratia, I was so mad. But I tried to kick her—and I called her names—yes, I did !" owned Raymond, with what sounded like some lingering traces of compunction.

"And you are sorry, Raymond ?"

"No, I *ain't*," sputtered Raymond ; "I ain't one bit sorry. I wish I could have bit her old, ugly face !"

"Raymond !" Raymond !" remonstrated his sister, secretly glad that the young rebel could not see the amused look in her eyes.

"I don't care ! She told father, and father beat me. Oh, Gratia, my arm is so sore, and my head aches ; and I'm so cold and hungry besides !"

"Reach up to the top of the big box in the corner, and get one of those woolen blankets to wrap yourself in, dear," said Gratia, in a low voice, "and I will see that you have some supper."

True to her promise, she stole into the buttery while Mrs. Kempfield was presiding, with smiles and sweet words, over her husband's supper, and got some bread and butter, a piece of apple pie, and two or three seed cakes. These she put in a little basket, and going to the outside, boldly climbed the rotting



frame-work of slats which supported a leafless honeysuckle vine on the west end of the house, and tapped at the window.

Little Raymond was cowering, all in a heap, on the middle of the floor, his bright eyes shining like a squirrel's from the folds of the blanket that enveloped him.

He jumped up with an exclamation of delight as he saw his sister's face.

"Open the window, dear, and reach down," whispered Gratia. "Here's your supper. Give me the basket back, and she will never know what raven it was that fed my little Elijah."

"Oh, sister, couldn't I climb down that way?"

"What would be the use, Raymond?"

"Then we could run away together," whispered the little boy, his breath short and fast, "like the Babes in the Wood, you know, sister."

Gratia smiled and sighed.

"The time has not yet come for that, dear," she answered. "But, never fear, Raymond, you and I will break loose from this bondage yet."

Gratia's remonstrance to her father had proved of no avail. Raymond was despoiled of the little room his mother had fitted up for him with such fond maternal pride, and lodged ruthlessly in the bleak garret chamber, where the stars shone down, like freezing points of light, through the cracks in the roof, of bitter winter nights, and the child lay awake, cowering and trembling at the weird sound of loose boards flapping to and fro in the siding, as the wind howled drearily round the corner of the house.

One or two nights, moved by his tears and entreaties, Gratia stole up to his room in her stocking feet, and carried him down to her own bed, where he nestled down beside her like a little frightened lamb.

But Mrs. Kempfield, who always prowled round the house long after she was supposed to be in bed, soon discovered this.



It was promptly vetoed, and Raymond was left to shiver and sob by himself.

"There ain't no sense in a great boy, a'most six year old, makin' such a baby of himself!" said Mr. Kempfield, instigated to the expression of this opinion by his wife. "And, Gratia, you've just got to leave off interferin'."

But one keen February morning, when Raymond woke up with a suffocating sensation in his throat, and gasping for breath, Gratia burst through all bonds of policy or filial obedience.

"Raymond ain't down to breakfast agin," said Mr. Kempfield, looking frowningly at the empty chair, as he entered. "There ain't no use in his dilly-dallyin' so. You needn't save him nothin', Almira."

"Gratia has some notion in her head about his being sick," said the step-mother, "but I dare say it's all make-believe and laziness."

Gratia turned from the stove, where she was preparing a mustard plaster for her brother's chest; her cheek was very pale, and her eyes sparkled with scarcely repressed indignation.

"He has got the croup," she said—"that is all."

"I don't believe it," said Mrs. Kempfield, sharply; but the farmer looked alarmed.

Raymond had been attacked once or twice with this fearful and insidious malady in his former wife's life-time, and he had not forgotten the terror of those seasons of vigil and prayer.

"He used to have the croup," said he, glancing, as if apologetically, at Almira. "Maybe we'd better have a doctor."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Kempfield, pettishly. "I dare say he may have a bad cold—children are always picking up colds—and I'll stew up a little butter and vinegar and molasses together when I've got through the thick of the work. That's the best thing in the world for a cold. I'll see to it all, Ira, dear—you needn't worry one particle."

And Mr. Kempfield went out to the upland woods where he



was felling trees, thoroughly convinced that little Raymond was in the best of hands.

But as noon approached the child grew worse, and Gratia vainly implored his step-mother to allow her to send for one of the Playfairs, since she would not listen to the idea of summoning medical aid.

“Nonsense!” cried Mrs. Kempfield; “you act like a mad fool. See—he is better now.”

Little Raymond, waking from a brief sleep, started and shrank at the sound of his step-mother’s voice.

“Gratia! Gratia!” he strove to enunciate, vainly trying, by thrusting his finger into his mouth, to clear away the fatal obstruction to his speech. “Don’t let it choke me, sister!”

Gratia sprang to the opposite window, and, throwing it open, called to a little boy on the door-step opposite:

“Charlie! Charlie Playfair! run for the doctor as fast as you can, and tell him to come here at once! Do you hear me?—*at once!*”

Then, as Charlie Playfair sped down the road, as fleetly as only a boy of twelve, lithe and lean as a fox, can run, she drew down the sash and confronted her father’s wife.

“Woman!” she cried, “if—if this little darling dies, it will be because of you. Hush! do you hear how hard he breathes? Raymond! Raymond! look up—speak to me! Almira Bassett!” she uttered, in a tone of voice that was almost a shriek, “if he dies, I will denounce you as a murderess!”

The cup Mrs. Kempfield was holding fell to the floor, shattering into a score of pieces, her lips grew white, and she started and glanced round as if Gratia were addressing a crowd behind her. One instant she stood silent, panting like an enraged animal; then she spoke in a smothered voice, as if the cords of her throat were drawn up by intense passion:

“Gratia Kempfield, I swear I’ll be revenged on you for that word!”



"Do your worst!" cried the girl, recklessly. "I fear you no longer!"

"Ah!" hissed Mrs. Kempfield, "but you don't know yet what my worst can and will be. You have called me a—a murderess—and I *will* be revenged!"

Gracia did not answer her; she was stooping over the couch, where Raymond already seemed better from the effects of the simple remedies she had applied.

The doctor came soon—fortunately he lived at no considerable distance—and before Ira Kempfield came home to supper little Raymond was laughing and playing among the nest of pillows and blankets his sister had made for him in front of the fire.

"I told you there was nothing the matter with him," said Mrs. Kempfield, "only Gratia is so ridiculously fussy."

But she took care not to say this in the presence of her step-daughter, for Gratia knew, as well as she did, that they had that day stood face to face with the grim despoiler, Death.

And neither of them forgot the looks and tones with which Almira Kempfield had sworn to be avenged upon the girl who had dared to call her a murderess.

---

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE TWENTY-DOLLAR BILL.

The winter was nearly over, and little Raymond Kempfield had experienced no return of his deadly enemy, the croup.

Gratia was sitting sewing one afternoon, when the sky without wore the soft, intense blue of a much later period in the season, and the bland air was full of the scents of swelling buds and the greening southern slopes, and Raymond knelt on the floor at her feet, studying out the pictures in an ancient "Webster's Spelling Book." He was thinner and paler than he had



been in the fall, but the change had been so gradual that Gratia scarcely perceived it. Mrs. Kempfield's persecutions and petty tyrannies were as unremitting as ever, but the sister and brother bore them together with Spartan valiantness, looking forward to some conquering future—what, or when, the poor things scarcely knew—that was to deliver them from this galling bondage in due time.

“Sister, sister!” cried Raymond, jumping up to look out of the window, “there comes Joe Johnson down the road.”

Joe Johnson it was—a gray-haired, erect old peddler, who traveled the country through, every spring and fall, with his japanned cases of silks, jewelry, and knickknacks, for the benefit of the farmer's wives, daughters, and sisters, who were beyond the reach of other than village finery. He was a good-natured old man, popular enough wherever he went, and he never for a moment doubted a welcome under any roof which happened to shelter him at the moment when the shades of night overtook him.

Mrs. Kempfield bustled in from the back room, and stretched her neck to look out of the window over Raymond's head.

“Sure enough, it's him,” said she, “and he's come just in the nick of time. My black silk is getting too shabby to be decent, and your father promised me a birthday present of a new pair of ear-rings.”

The black silk dress was duly purchased—a cheap, shiny silk, which Mrs. Kempfield judged was likely to make the most show for the money, and it was not until evening, when Ira himself was at home, that the peddler revealed the glories of what he called his “joowalry department.”

“Now,” quoth he, solemnly wagging his head, “them ear-rings is just about what Mrs. Kempfield wants for her style of beauty. Gold pendings with a bar of real coral across each, and a gold fringe all the way round—they're elegant—real gems in their way.”



"Them's real neat, I declare," said Ira. "How much be they, Joe?"

"Them is cheap at twelve dollars," Joe answered. "I'd ask fourteen anywhere's else, but I calc'late to get my night's lodgin' here, and I've got some of the Arab notions about over-chargin' folks whose salt I've eaten. Call 'em twelve."

"I didn't calc'late to give but eight," said Ira. "Miss Howe's got a new pair over to Wingley, didn't cost but eight—real big 'uns, with a yaller stun in the center of each, and an imitation of a horse-shoe hangin' down."

"Oh, them couldn't a been real gold at that price," said Joe, loftily. "It's what they call oreide. No one that ain't a judge o' joowalry could tell the difference, but I shouldn't try to put off oreide on you nor your lady, Mr. Kempfield."

After some bargaining the ear-rings were finally purchased for ten dollars, and Joe Johnson deposited the bills Mr. Kempfield had given him in a plethoric porte-monnaie of faded red leather.

"Pretty well filled, eh?" said Ira, jocosely, glancing at it.

"Wal, not so bad," chuckled the old man; "but I hain't made so much as usual this trip, so far."

"Gratia," persisted Raymond, who had climbed on a chair to survey the splendors of old Joe Johnson's "jewelry department," "wouldn't you like this locket to hang round your neck? Phebe Ann Playfair has got a locket, with some of George Liston's hair in it."

Gratia had stopped at that instant to pick up a twenty-dollar bill which had fallen from the overcrowded porte-monnaie, and as she gave it back to the peddler, she exclaimed, impulsively:

"I would rather have that bill, Raymond, than all the gold lockets in creation."

"Eh!" said the old man, good-humoredly; "'tain't often young gals would rather have money than money's worth."



"I am not like other girls," Gratia answered, shortly.

"No, you're not, more's the pity!" commented her step-mother.

At nine o'clock, just as those primitive people were beginning to think about bed, Mrs. Kempfield came into the room with a steaming coffee-pot in her hand.

"That smells proper good," said old Joe, smacking his lips.

"I thought I'd make some, seein' it was a cold night, and Ira's partial to coffee," said Mrs. Kempfield, hospitably.

"There's a wife worth havin'," remarked the peddler, as Mrs. Kempfield went back to the buttery for some cups.

"There ain't many like her," said Ira, in the conscious pride of possessing a treasure that Solomon rates "far above rubies."

Meanwhile this invaluable gift was softly dropping something from the dark vial labeled "Laudanum" into the various cups ranged before her on a small japanned tray.

"I've made the coffee so strong they won't taste it," she thought, "and I mean every one in the house shall sleep sound to-night, except me."

As she poured out the hot, fragrant beverage, and passed it around, Ira noticed that she had provided no cup for herself.

"Ain't you goin' to take none, Almiry?" he asked, solicitously.

"I guess not to-night," his wife answered. "I've got something of a headache, and coffee generally keeps me awake at night."

"Well, it does me, too," said Joe Johnson, pouring his coffee into the saucer, and drinking it with evident relish; "but this 'ere smelt so good it warn't in human natur' to say 'no' when you brought it round."

It happened, rather curiously, that the coffee did not keep Joe Johnson awake that night. He slept like a man under the dominion of some heavy trance, so soundly that he did not hear the rustle of garments through his room, nor feel the velvety touch of fingers tampering with the purse that always lay under-



neath his pillow. Gratia, too, slept a heavy, unresting sleep, all unconscious, poor girl, that it was her last peaceful slumber beneath her father's roof-tree.

Joe Johnson was on his way, the next morning, bright and early ; but when the Kempfield family were sitting down to their midday meal of boiled pork and cabbage, with baked potatoes and a boiled Indian pudding, yellow and steaming from its bag, they were surprised—some members of it, at least—to see the old man's face re-appearing on their threshold with a perplexed, frightened look.

“Just in time for dinner, Mr. Johnson,” said Almira, smilingly, jumping up for an additional plate, although the surprise had brought a deep color to her cheek, and evidently startled her nerves somewhat. “Sit down, and take a bite with us, won't you?”

“You hain't forgot nothin', have you, Joe?” said Mr. Kempfield, with a choice wedge of pork uplifted on the end of his two-tined fork, midway to his mouth.

“I don't fairly know whether I have or not,” said the peddler, sitting down and wiping his heated brow with a spotted silk pocket-handkerchief. “That twenty-dollar bill I had here last night—it dropped on the floor, you remember, and Gracia, there, picked it up.”

“Yes, I remember,” said Mr. Kempfield.

“Well, I can't find it nowheres !”

“You don't say so !” said Ira, bolting the piece of pork, and dropping both knife and fork.

“I know it was in my pocket-book last night, for I counted all my money over in my room the last thing before I went to bed, and I never opened it agin till I got to Squire Martin's, and then it warn't there.”

“Maybe it's in your room, lyin' about somewhere,” suggested Ira.

“I don't see how it could be,” said Joe, “for I remember puttin' it away in the inside flap, and bucklin' it with the little



red strap that slips over ; but there ain't no harm in lookin'. You haint swep' up, nor nothin', have you, ma'am ?" he added, with a glance toward Mrs. Kempfield. "I'd know the bill anywhere, for I'd drawed a cross in red ink at the back on't. That's what I do with all my big bills."

"Well, no, I haven't, by sheer good luck," said she. "I don't know that a soul has been in the room since you left it. I was calculating to whitewash and do the spring cleaning there to-morrow, so I haven't even made the bed."

"All the better for me," said the peddler.

And the whole family proceeded up to assist in the search, with the exception of Gratia, who remained at the table below, quietly finishing her dinner.

But no amount of search could produce a missing treasure which most assuredly was not there, and presently Joe Johnson desisted in despair.

"Well, I do declare !" he ejaculated again, scrubbing at his wet forehead. "It's enough to make a feller believe in witchcraft. The bill hadn't legs, and it couldn't run away."

"No, but other people's legs might have run away with it," said Mrs. Kempfield, in a voice purposely lowered.

"Eh ?" said the peddler.

"I'm blamed if I don't believe Almira's got an idee !" said Ira, admiringly.

"I am not one that likes to suggest, or even believe, evil of any one else," began Mrs. Kempfield, with well-dissembled reluctance, "but you all heard what Gratia said last night."

"Gratia !" echoed the farmer.

"Gratia !" uttered old Joe Johnson, in the same breath, and then there was a second or two of silence, in which you could have heard a pin drop.

"You—you don't think *she* took it ?" said Joe, hesitatingly, and then Ira Kempfield swore a deep oath.

"Man, take care what you are saying !" he thundered.



"My girl may have her faults—I dare say she has—but she ain't no thief!"

Joe shrank into a corner before the farmer's blazing eyes, but Mrs. Kempfield threw herself artfully into the breach.

"Dear Ira, don't be rash," she purred. "Only you know Gratia *did* express a strong wish for just that sum of money—and since it has disappeared so unaccountably, there can be no harm in just looking into her room. Only to satisfy ourselves, you know, and she need never know of it. Girls will do strange things sometimes, and you know, dear, Gratia is the strangest girl!"

"Search her room at once," said Ira, huskily. "She's my daughter, and she sha'n't lie for a minute under no unjust suspicion. I insist on havin' an out-and-out search made this minute, if it's only in justice to her."

"I hain't made no accusation," began the peddler, but——"

"I don't care whether you have or not," roared Ira Kempfield. "Almira, come. I'll have my gal's name cleared at once from the very shadow of a doubt."

"The three hurried at once to Gratia's neat little room, just across the entry, and Ira tossed and tumbled everything about, with Joe Johnson standing at his side.

"There!" he cried, with an accent of triumph, "I told you so. We've looked everywhere."

As he spoke he opened the washstand drawer, where Gratia kept a little box containing a string of old gold beads which had belonged to her mother, a blue glass brooch, and one or two other comparatively valueless trinkets. He tumbled out the contents, and there, tightly folded, and laid in the very bottom of the box, so that it still adhered after the other things were out, lay the twenty-dollar bill, with the cross of red ink flaming up in full view.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## GRATIA CHOOSES FOR HERSELF.

For a second or so there was a hush upon the three occupants of the room, and then Mrs. Kempfield exclaimed :

“Didn’t I tell you so!”

“Wal!” cried Joe Johnson, slapping one hand upon his thigh, “I wouldn’t a-believed it if I hadn’t seen it for myself. And she such a pretty, innocent-faced creatur, too—wal, wal, there ain’t no accountin’ for some things!”

Kempfield himself had stood silent, staring on the folded bill, as if it were some venomous asp, coiled up and about to sting him. Then he strode to the door, and called out, in the deep tone of suppressed rage :

“Gratia!”

“Well, father?”

The girl came lightly up the stairs, but stopped in surprise on seeing that they were in her room, instead of, as she supposed, searching that the peddler had occupied on the previous night.

“What possessed you to do this thing, girl?” savagely demanded Ira Kempfield.

“What thing, father?” asked Gratia, looking at him, thoroughly bewildered. “What has happened? What are you all doing here?”

“Don’t trifle with me!” almost shouted her father. “You are a thief! You have stolen this money, and you have dared to face it out by falsehood.”

“Father, what do you mean?” cried Gratia, pushing the hair back from her brow, and looking at him in surprise. “I have touched no money.”

“Then how came it here?”



He held up the little box with the red-crossed bill still lying wedged at its bottom.

Gratia, feeling as people sometimes feel in the bondage of a hideous dream, beheld this silent witness to her guilt. From thence she looked first at the faces of her father and the old peddler—then at that of Almira. Mrs. Kempfield was standing with the corners of her mouth demurely drawn down, and a look of hypocritical regret upon her face, but Gratia could see the glitter of malicious triumph beneath her scanty black eyelashes, and in an instant she comprehended it all.

“This is *your* doing!” she cried out to her step-mother.

But Ira Kempfield grasped her arm as if in a vise of iron.

“Hold your tongue, girl!” he thundered. “How dare you speak so to one who has been only too good and considerate of you! I’ll shake the teeth out of your head if you venture to breathe another such word!”

“Hush, dear!” said Mrs. Kempfield, laying a soothing hand on her husband’s wrist; “never mind *me*—I’m used to Gratia’s ingratitude. Only I am sorry that *your* daughter should be proved a thief. I’ve tried to hide her faults in the best way I could, but——”

“A—thief!” slowly repeated Ira, still retaining a grasp of his daughter’s arm that made her shudder and turn pale with pain.

“Yes—that’s the word. That’s exactly what she is!”

“Father!”

He pushed her violently from him.

“I ain’t an angel like Almira!” he exclaimed. “I ain’t one that finds new names for ugly things, and it kind o’ breaks me down to know that my gal is a common thief, and a liar besides. My home ain’t no place for such as *her*!”

“Sho, sho!” cried the old peddler, in genuine astonishment and distress. “You wouldn’t turn your own flesh and blood out of doors, Ira Kempfield?”

And the step-mother interposed with a show of sympathy and gentleness.



"Ira ! Ira ! just think what you're saying, dear."

Gratia turned quickly to her.

"I do not want *your* intercession, Almira Bassett !" she uttered. "Be silent !"

"Well, I declare !" said old Johnson, "if that 'are ain't what I call downright ingratitude ! The gal don't know her friends when she sees 'em !"

"Yes, I do, Mr. Johnson," said Gratia, trying to calm her quivering voice, "and that woman is not among the number. She is doing her best to ruin me, and she may succeed, but she will not blind me by her arts and pretenses."

Mrs. Kempfield's eyes flashed vindictively, but her soft tones never varied as she responded :

"You'll be sorry for what you are saying yet, Gratia. But I'll not lay it up against you."

"There, there !" said Joe Johnson, good-naturedly. "I swow, I'm most as sorry as if I hadn't found the bill. But Gratia's young, and everybody knows one swallow doesn't make a summer. Let's all keep our own counsel about this 'ere, and nobody'll be none the wiser. I dare say it'll be a lesson to the gal, and——"

"Stop, Mr. Johnson !" resolutely interposed Gratia. "I swear to you that I am as ignorant of how that bill came into my possession as the tiniest babe that breathes on God's earth this day. And if I lay on my dying-bed I would still say the same."

Joe Johnson sorrowfully shook his grizzled head.

"I'd believe you if I could, Gratia," he said, "but the facts speak out too plain. And you'd best remember that there never was a fault patched over yet by lyin' about it."

For the rest of that week Gratia Kempfield's position in the household was that of an ostracized person. Both Mr. Kempfield and her step-mother avoided her as if she had a sort of moral plague-spot upon her ; and when necessity compelled them to come in contact with her, they spoke as little as



possible. And from the looks and tones of the neighbors whom she occasionally saw, she could not but gather that they too were in possession of the story her step-mother had seen fit to spread abroad.

Things had gone on thus for some days, and Gratia, after much thought and deliberation, had finally arrived at the conclusion to ask her father to send her somewhere to school where she could complete her somewhat neglected education in a manner to enable her to earn her own living as a teacher when she should be a year or two older.

But one evening when her father had returned from the neighboring village later than usual, and her step-mother was away taking tea with Miss Pemberton, she resolved to make a bold push in her own behalf.

"Father," she began, hesitatingly, as she set the teapot on the table and took her seat opposite him, with a newly lighted tallow candle flickering between them. But he interrupted her before she could proceed further.

"Gratia," he said, abruptly, "I want you to pack up your things this evening. You are going to Packenbridge, where your mother"—Gratia winced as he spoke the word, and it did not sweeten his mood to observe it—"has a cousin who runs a shirt-factory. He employs twenty or thirty hands and you'll be useful to sweep up shop and make fires, and oil the machines, and do such like odd-jobs till you've learned the trade!"

"Father," she remonstrated, "father do not send me there! Mother always wanted me to be a teacher, and I think I could prepare myself in a little while if——"

"Oh, pshaw!" said Mr. Kempfield. "I hain't neither time nor money to spend on any such topping notions. Almira says you hain't no faculty to teach——"

"Mamma thought otherwise," interrupted Gratia, her cheeks crimsoning, "and mamma ought to know, for she taught school herself once."

"Yes, yes; I dare say," said Kempfield, evading, as he always



did, the mention of his dead wife's name; "but things are changed now."

"They are indeed!" cried Gratia, passionately. "Oh, father, father! I am sometimes tempted to believe in the old-world stories of witchcraft when I see how Almira Bassett has turned your heart away from us—from Raymond and me."

Ira Kempfield rose from his chair, muttering a suppressed oath between his teeth.

"Look here, gal," he said. "I don't mean to stand this sort of thing any longer. It's just as Almire says—you're a fire-brand in the house, and there'll never be peace in it as long as you stay. Do as I say, and put your things together, for to-morrow mornin' you start for Packerbridge, to go into Milo Bassett's shirt factory. Raymond would be a tolerably decent child if once he was out o' your influence, and I mean to give him a chance."

Mrs. Kempfield came smiling and simpering home at nine o'clock, and Gratia said nothing to her of the conversation that had taken place between her father and herself. She did not mean to go to Packerbridge—upon *that* question she had fully made up her mind. A plan which she had often thought of as possible, in some unforeseen emergency, now presented itself definitely to her mind, as the only course to be taken, and it was this:

Mrs. Homer—a woman who made wax flowers—had been used, in the reign of the first Mrs. Kempfield, to make long visitations at the old Kempfield farm-house, and the only *quid pro quo* which she ever proffered for her board and lodging was an oft-repeated invitation for Gratia and Mrs. Kempfield to "come and visit her in New York. Make it your home with me, if ever you come," she had said, with that silver-plating of manner that passes among so many indiscriminating souls for the genuine metal, and Gratia had unhesitatingly believed in Mrs. Homer.

"I will go to New York," she thought, "and she will give



me a kindly welcome, until I can at least find something to do. I will work hard, and make a home for dear little Raymond, and then I will come after him, and we will be so happy together."

She had no resources, save about five dollars that had been given to her by her mother for some fancied necessity just before her death, and which she had never since had the heart to spend. Besides this, there were the old gold beads, which were of some intrinsic value, and a quarter-eagle in gold that she had possessed ever since she was a child.

She did pack up her things that night, but it was different from what Mr. Kempfield expected. Instead of filling the painted pine box, that constituted her only trunk, with the various details of her simple wardrobe, she took only such articles as were absolutely necessary, and rolled them into a compact bundle. She dressed herself in a plain black alpaca dress which had been part of her unpretending mourning, tied on a black felt hat, and wrapped a dyed shawl about her. It was all coarse, plain, and old fashioned, for Almira Kempfield had persuaded her husband that it was unnecessary to buy any new articles of dress for "a mere child like Gratia" since her mother's death.

Gliding softly, like a shadow, across the hall, she lifted the latch of the garret stair-way, and went up to little Raymond's room.

"Poor little Raymond," she murmured to herself. "But I must be patient; it will be but for a little while."

The child woke with a start, as she laid her cool hand softly on his forehead.

"Hush, dear!" she whispered. "Don't be startled, Raymond. I have come to tell you good-by."

He threw his arms about her, clinging to her with a convulsive shivering, which was partly terror and alarm, and partly the chill of insufficient clothing in the raw air of the early morning.

"Where are you going, Gratia?"



"I can hardly tell you, Raymond ; I do not quite know myself. Somewhere to escape from *this* hideous life—somewhere, away from *her*."

"Oh, take me, too, Gratia !" sobbed the little fellow. "There'll be no one to love me if you are gone."

How she wished that it had been in her power to consent to his prayer ; how bitterly the iron of her desolate condition entered into her soul at that moment.

"Some day I will take you, Raymond," she answered, trying to speak encouragingly. "Be brave and don't give up. I am going to try and make a home for us both, where we can live together always, you and I."

"Good-by, sister ! You're sure it won't be long—'cause I shall be so lonesome !"

"Only a little while, dear. I won't tell you where I am going, because I want you to speak the truth when they ask you—to be able to say that you don't know. But I shall come back one of these day, and take you with me."

He felt her kiss upon his forehead, and the next minute he was alone.

---

## CHAPTER IX.

### OUT INTO THE WORLD.

As Gratia Kempfield let herself out at the kitchen door and hurried across the lonely fields, the dreary darkness of the hour before dawn was just beginning to be dappled by the coming glow of sunrise. The sweet air from the ravines and hollows greeted her with delicious breath ; the clear whistle of birds, just rousing to the new life of the spring day, sounded in her ear like the cheery voice of friends.

A walk of four miles lay before her ere she could reach the depot, where a train bound for the distant city stopped at a



quarter before six. There were a few waiting passengers lounging around the little wooden platform, talking idly about chance matters, glancing at their watches, or listening for the distant whistle of the coming train.

It came at last, sweeping round the curve of the woods, and in another moment Gratia was being whirled along with a speed that seemed to her almost fabulous.

She had Mrs. Homer's address, written in pencil on a slip of paper, and thither she was determined to bend her steps the first thing.

She addressed the nearest policeman, asking for the information she required.

He told her, civilly enough, and even placed her in a car telling the conductor where to stop.

"No. — Seventh avenue! here you are!" bawled the conductor presently, and Gratia alighted.

It was no pleasant little house, standing by itself, as Gratia fancied it might be, but one of a block of tall, cheap-looking, stucco-fronted houses, with a large fancy store bearing the number. Into this store Gratia went, and humbly inquired for Mrs. Homer.

"Homer?—Homer?" repeated the young lady in cheap silk and imitation jewelry, who stood behind the counter. "I don't know no such name."

"Perhaps it's the woman that lives up on the third story," said another, who was sorting different colored skeins of silk for embroidery.

Acting upon this suggestion, Gratia ascended the stairs, and on the third floor her heart gave a bound of joy as, in the face of the person who opened the second door at which she knocked, she beheld the familiar lineaments of Mrs. Homer.

"Dear me!" said that lady, after a minute's unrecognizing stare, "it's Gratia, ain't it?—the farmer's girl, up among the mountains?"



"Yes, it is I, Mrs. Homer," said Gratia. "May I come in? I'm very tired, and have had no breakfast."

Mrs. Homer was a tall, uncompromising looking female, with pale blue eyes, scanty fringes of curls hanging down on each side of her face, and lips so thin as to resemble a mere gathering thread in her face.

"Yes, you may come in," said Mrs. Homer, rather coldly. "Sit down. I haven't a thing in the house to eat, but I suppose I can send out for a few rolls or something. How is your mother?"

"My mother is dead," said Gratia, with a quivering lip.

"Dear me! you don't tell me so! Well, she always was sickly looking, and we've all got to die."

"And," pursued Gratia, beginning to weep, "my father has married again, and I am very unhappy, and—and I've left home."

"There, don't cry, for pity's sake!" said Mrs. Homer. "I hate a scene. I never was one of the crying sort myself, and I don't like to see it in others."

All this time she had not asked Gratia to remove her things, but stood before her, as if expecting that her stay would be of the shortest.

"And as for your father marrying again:" she added, after a moment or two of cold silence, "I dare say it was the best thing he could do."

"But do you know the woman he has chosen?" gasped Gratia, the sickly chill of disappointment beginning to steal over her heart. "I would sooner die than endure her tyranny."

"Humph!" commented Mrs. Homer. "It's easy to talk of dying. And what do you calculate you are going to do?"

"Mrs. Homer," began Gratia, with some spirit, "you have found a home at our house for weeks at a time, and you have frequently invited us to return your visits. I thought you would let me stay with you for a little while until——"

"As for that," broke in Mrs. Homer's hard, measured tones,



contrasting strangely with the wild, impulsive thrill of Gratia's soft voice, "I always paid my way. I made a bunch o' wax flowers for your ma's center-table, worth twenty-five dollars at the very least, and I gave you an elegant black silk gown, that hadn't been in wear over five years. I don't consider myself anybody's debtor."

Forlorn and miserable as she was, Gratia could scarcely forbear from smiling, as she remembered the tuft of damaged wax flowers so graciously bestowed on Mrs. Kempfield by her visitor, after their shade had been overturned and broken, and the bouquet itself too hopelessly bent and crushed to be of any marketable value; and the dyed silk gown, worn threadbare, and cut in the gathers, which not even Mrs. Kempfield's ingenuity could make into a useful garment.

"I should not want to stay long," said Gratia, meekly; "only till I get a situation."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Homer, dryly. "Situations don't grow, like blackberries, on every bush. Now you're beginning to cry again—dear me!"

"No," said Gratia, courageously, wiping away the tears. "Do not be afraid, Mrs. Homer; I shall not make what you call a scene. Only I am so faint and weary! If I could lie down on the sofa a little while——"

"Yes," said Mrs. Homer; "and here comes Frances with the rolls. You'll feel better after you've eaten a bit."

Mrs. Homer's niece, a tall, forbidding girl, with sandy hair frizzed, and curled, and chignoned to an extreme that seemed simply ludicrous in Gratia's country eyes, had brought in three small French rolls, wrapped in paper, and a tiny wedge of cheese, and with this insufficient meal Gratia was forced to be content.

The room was shabbily and scantily furnished, the window-panes were clouded with dirt, and the tawdry gilt cornices laden with dust. There was but a morsel of fire in the rusty grate,



although the air was full of spring chilliness, and the room smelt close and confined as a vault.

"Couldn't I learn your business, Mrs. Homer?" said Gratia.

"You could learn it, I suppose," said Mrs. Homer, "but you couldn't live on it."

"Why not?"

"Business is overcrowded a'ready," was the brief reply.

"But don't you know of anything else that I could do?" asked Gratia, after a short pause.

"Miss Perry might know of something," suggested Frances to her aunt. "Miss Perry, in the fancy store below stairs, you know. There's lots of people come to her to inquire for help in one business and another. Wouldn't it be worth while to go down and ask?"

"Well—I don't care if you do," she hesitated. "You go with her, Gratia. I can make up this sprig better if I'm alone."

Miss Perry, the proprietress of the lace, ribbon, and French gilt jewelry depot down stairs, was a fat, gaudily dressed old maid, with spectacles and false teeth.

"A situation, eh?" said Miss Perry, aloud, in answer to Frances Homer's whispered communication. "Any reference?"

"Oh, she's never lived out. She is just from the country," said Frances.

"Can you sew?"

"I can sew neatly, but not fast."

"Know anything of housework?"

"Oh, yes," Gratia answered, brightly. "I have been brought up to work, and I can do a little of anything."

Miss Perry opened a drawer, and shuffled through its contents until she succeeded in unearthing a fat memorandum-book, which she opened, referring to a list of addresses on the last page.

"I suppose, as you haven't any recommend, and are a green



hand, you'll not expect high wages?" she asked, beginning to unscrew a silver pencil-case.

"Certainly not, ma'am," said Gratia, humbly.

"There's Mrs. Moultrie wants a girl to assist in the chamber-work and take care of children," said Miss Perry.

"Oh, I should like that," said Gratia; "I am fond of children."

"I ain't, then," said Miss Perry. "You might suit Mrs. Moultrie. Mind, I don't say for certain you *would*—but you might. There's no harm in trying, at all events."

"I suppose she'd better go at once," said Frances, after they had come back up stairs.

"Oh, of course," said Mrs. Homer. "And of course you'll have to go with her to show her the way—that's the bother of these country people. And, Gratia, see here—you must try and suit in this new place, for I may as well tell you first as last, I can't keep a free hotel for every stranger that comes along."

Gratia inclined her head, but she could not resist the temptation of flashing back a quick retort.

"We extended a different welcome to *you*, Mr. Homer, when you staid with us for a month at a time."

"Oh, I dare say," said the inhospitable matron, rather uneasily. "But, you see, the cases aren't at all alike. People in the country have nothing to do but to entertain company."

Frances Homer, evidently glad of any reasonable excuse to get out into the fresh air, walked with Gratia to Lexington avenue, where Mrs. Corkson Moultrie lived. Gratia glanced at the plate-glass windows, lined with the rosy folds of silken curtains and the fleecy fall of lace, with a sort of awe.

"It looks like a palace," she faltered. "Oh, Miss Homer, I am almost afraid to try."

"Pshaw!" said Frances. "Faint heart never won fair lady,



and I dare say you'll suit. I almost wish I was going to live out myself, Aunt Homer is so trying."

With difficulty Gratia summoned sufficient nerve to pull the door-bell, and her heart throbbed violently as answering footsteps resounded along the marble-paved floor of the hall beyond.

As the broad doors swung noiselessly inward on their silver-plated hinges, Gratia found herself confronting a smart maid, with a flounced alpaca dress, and pink ribbons in her hair.

"What do you want?" sharply demanded this personage.

---

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MATERNAL HOME.

"I came to see Mrs. Moultrie. Miss Perry sent me," faltered Gratia.

"My missis can't be disturbed now," said the maid, with a toss of her pink-ribboned head; "she's got company."

"Then I will wait," said Gratia, with a resolution which had its origin in simple desperation.

Presently two ladies, richly dressed, came out of an inner apartment, and a tall, portly personage, with blue eyes, an exquisitely fair complexion, and a quantity of lustrous, pale brown hair, accompanied them as far as the threshold.

Her dress was of bright blue silk, and she wore a blue velvet house basque, trimmed with swan's-down, rosetted slippers, and rich jewels, that made a jingling sound as she walked; and, moreover, Gratia had plenty of time to observe all these details. She had a soft, gracious manner, and lisped slightly in her speech.

"Then you may expect them next week," said the taller of the two ladies.



"I shall count the days," said Mrs. Moultrie. "Dear little things; but you know I am so foolishly fond of children."

And she smiled and nodded them from her presence.

"Now, what is it?" she said, abruptly, turning to Gratia the instant the door closed behind her retreating guests, and with as complete a change in countenance and expression as if she were a different person.

Gratia told her errand with a sinking heart; she was quite certain she never should be able to suit this elegant personage's requirements.

"Oh, yes, it's quite right," said Mrs. Moultrie. "I *do* need a nurse-girl. Simmons, my head nurse, is a very experienced woman, but I want some one to assist her. Do you know anything about children?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am."

"Well—Simmons will show you everything." Mrs. Moultrie touched a little bell on the hall table.

"Have you many children, ma'am?" Gratia ventured to ask.

"Six—or seven. I don't exactly know which. I expect two more next week."

Gratia opened her eyes wildly, but before she had an opportunity to ask any further questions a tall, somber-looking woman, in black, came down stairs.

"Simmons," said Mrs. Moultrie, "here is a young person come about the place of nurse-maid."

"Yes, 'um," said Simmons, sourly.

"I think she'll do," said Mrs. Moultrie.

"What wages do she want, 'um?" said Simmons, looking at Gratia as if she were a spider or a reptile, or some other disagreeable object.

"We hadn't mentioned that," said Mrs. Moultrie, indifferently. "Of course, I expect to give her what Susanne had—twelve dollars a month. Will that suit you, Grace?"



"Quite so, ma'am," said Gratia, hesitatingly; "but my name is Gratia."

"I dare say," said Mrs. Moultrie, "but I shall call you Grace. I don't like those three-volume novel names. Take her up into the nursery, Simmons, and don't let me have any more trouble about it."

Simmons beckoned Gratia to follow her, and Mrs. Moultrie rustled back into the parlor, while the girl ascended the softly carpeted stairs, and passed through a long entry into a sort of back building. Here the external splendor seemed to cease. The next flight of stairs was uncarpeted, the bare white walls were finger-marked and dirty, and the light streamed through unwashed windows, guiltless of shade or drapery. While Gratia was wondering at this difference in general effect, a door was thrown open by Simmons, with the brief remark :

"This is the nursery."

It was a large, dreary room, with a row of cribs along one side, a faded oil-cloth on the floor, and almost no furniture, save what was absolutely necessary. There were four or five little children in the room, but they were not playing, or shouting, as children ordinarily do. One was asleep in its crib—another lay stretched on the rug before the fire, sucking her thumb and gazing up at the ceiling with lack-luster eyes—the others were sitting on the floor, apparently busied in no particular amusement or avocation.

"Nurse, nurse," cried one, as Simmons entered, "won't you let Flora out? She's cried, oh, *so* hard."

Mrs. Simmons shook her head.

"She's to stay in the dark closet till the naughty bears come to eat her up," she said, austere. "That's what always happens to little girls as says they don't love Mrs. Moultrie."

The little boy crept nearer to his companion, with round, scared eyes.

"Will the bears come in here, nurse?"

"Yes, if I call 'em."



"Oh, dear—oh, dear!" wailed the little fellow, "I want to go home! I want my papa!"

"George," said Mrs. Simmons, with a stamp of her foot that sounded like a miniature report of artillery, "do you remember what was done to Aleck White when he cried to go home?"

"Yes," admitted George, with drooping head.

"What?"

"He was shut up and whipped, and he hit his head against the door. Will he die, nurse?"

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Simmons, giving the little child who lay on the rug a push with her foot. "Aleck, get up."

The child, a little fellow of scarcely five years old, obeyed, and sat up, but did not offer to move further.

"Is he sleepy?" asked Gratia, hurrying to his side.

"Please to let him alone," said Mrs. Simmons, with acidity. "Discipline is discipline, and I can't and won't have mine interfered with. He's only sulky, and as ugly as Satan to boot. Aleck!"

"Yes, nurse."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sick?"

"Me tired, nurse."

"Grace, look after that child in the crib. She acts queer; perhaps she's going to have a fit."

"Hadn't I better go for a doctor?" said Gracia, growing pale.

"What should you go for a doctor for?" sniffed Mrs. Simmons, contemptuously. "Those Townsends are always fitty. Two of 'em has died here."

"Here?"

"Why, yes; what are you staring for? It's a home for children."



Gratia had taken the little four-year-old creature from the crib and nestled it close to her bosom.

"See," said Gratia, "she thinks I'm her mother."

"Fiddlestick!" said Mrs. Simmons; "much she knows about mothers anyhow. Her mother died when she was born, and her father's got a young wife that don't want to be bothered with another woman's children."

"Me got a mamma," cried little George, triumphantly.

"Yes, and you might just as well not have any," said Mrs. Simmons; "she's a gay woman, going to balls and parties, and glad to get decently rid of you. Aleck, sit up again."

"Me so tired, nurse!"

"I don't care whether you are or not. That child is all right enough, Grace—you needn't fool any longer with her."

"But I like to hold the poor little thin thing," said Gratia, fondling the claw-like fingers which clasped themselves round her hand.

"I dare say, but you'll soon find this ain't no place for dawdling. There's something to do besides humoring cross young ones. Stretch these clothes ready for ironing—these children do dirty such a sight of clothes."

Gratia obeyed, but while she worked the sound of constant moanings reached her ears.

"What is that noise?" she asked at length, driven to a sort of desperation.

"It's only Flora Elwell," said Mrs. Simmons, "the most troublesome child we've got. She tried to run away yesterday, and she's settling accounts for it now—that's all."

"How old is she?"

"Six, I guess, or thereabouts."

"Oh, Mrs. Simmons, she is too young to be so harshly treated," pleaded Gratia. "Let me go to her."

"You just mind your own business till you're asked to meddle with other people's," said Mrs. Simmons, roughly. "I've



got the key of that dark closet in my pocket, and there it'll stay till I choose to take it out."

Gratia said no more, until Mrs. Simmons' temporary absence from the room gave her an opportunity.

"George," she said to the bright little boy, who was the only one among the children who evinced anything like childish animation or vivacity, "how often does Mrs. Moultrie visit the nursery?"

"Oh, Mamma Moultrie never comes."

"Why not?"

"Don't know," was the carelessly uttered reply.

"Is she good to you?"

"'Ess," Georgie answered. "I love Mamma Moultrie. I love Nurse Simmons. They whips little boys 'at don't say so. They whipped Aleck. Mamma Moultrie never comes here, but when my own mamma comes to see me I am washed and my hair curled, and I go to the company nursery, where Kate and Gussie Moultrie stay all the time. There's a big spotted rocking-horse there, and some marbles. It's nicer than it is here."

At this stage of Georgie's confidences Mrs. Simmons came back.

"If there isn't that dratted child over on his back again!" she exclaimed, setting poor little Aleck up with a jerk. "I believe he's gettin' to be a fool."

And the child's vacant face, as he looked up in her face, murmuring, "Me tired, me tired!" would almost seem to confirm her words.

"I'm sure if he is, it'll be all your fault," said a pleasant-looking woman, who had come in with a pile of blankets on her arm. "He was bright enough when first he came here, the Lord help him!"

"Hold your tongue, Hannah!" said Mrs. Simmons, sharply.

"Haven't you let that Flora out yet?" asked Hannah, paus-



ing after she had deposited her burden on one of the empty cribs.

“No!” snarled Nurse Simmons, showing her yellow, decayed stumps of teeth, like an infuriated elderly tigress.

“Well, then, it’s a shame!” ejaculated Hannah; “and if I knew where her friends were I’d let ’em know some of the goings on here.”

“Mrs. Simmons, I don’t at all understand this,” said Gratia. “Where is Mrs. Moultrie? Does she never visit these little children, whose cares she has taken upon her?”

Hannah, who had just reached the door-way, turned round and laughed.

“No!” she answered. “You’ll learn a thing or two, young woman, before you’ve been long in this place. Mrs. Moultrie pockets the money—plenty of it, there is, too, for the fools aren’t all dead yet—and acts the sweet, and affectionate, and amiable—dear, dear! none so soft as she. You’d think to hear her talk butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth—and there’s the end of it. All the rest you can see for yourself. Mrs. Simmons does the dirty work; she’s well paid for it, too—and the children do the starving, and fretting, and pining away.”

Aud having thus relieved her mind, Hannah went away.

“Would it not be better for me to put this little fellow on the lounge or in one of the cribs?” involuntarily asked Gratia, as she observed Aleck moving uneasily on his hard couch.

“No!” said Mrs. Simmons, with asperity, “he’s well enough. And he has got to sit up and behave like other children. I won’t have him encouraged in making a great baby of himself. Aleck! Aleck, I say!”

But the child did not answer, or seem to heed her call.

“I think he has fainted,” said Gratia, apprehensively.

“Pshaw! Stuff and nonsense!” said the amiable Mrs. Simmons. “It’s all stubbornness. Throw a cup of cold water up his nostrils—or, stay—better pinch him in the leg; a good nip, now.”



But instead of following this experienced counsel, Gratia took the wretched child tenderly in her arms. He opened his eyes and looked feebly up.

"He's sleepy," said George. "Nurse gave him two or three spoonfuls of sleepy drink last night, 'cause he cried. I heerd him, out of my crib."

"Hush!" said Mrs. Simmons, stamping her foot on the floor. "Land o' liberty! what long tongues these children have! Here, Grace," tossing a key toward her, "put Aleck down, and let him be quiet for three seconds at a time, if he will. You go to the closet, and see if anything ails Flora. She's left off whining this good while."

Following the direction of Mrs. Simmons' outstretched finger, Gratia unlocked the door of a dark closet, half full of mildewed boots and shoes, and stuffy-smelling clothes, and there, crouched up in a little heap, close to the threshold, lay a child, with rigid features, and tangled yellow curls, all matted together over an ashen face.

"Gracious heavens!" exclaimed Gratia, clasping her hands; "she is dead!"

---

## CHAPTER XI.

### GRATIA LEAVES HER SITUATION.

"Mercy on us!" cried Mrs. Simmons. "What a fool the girl is! Shut the door again; she is doing well enough; she's asleep; I'm used to their deceitful ways, and you ain't."

Gratia bent over and placed her hand against the child's lips, listening a moment for the breath that did not come.

"Oh, Mrs. Simmons, the poor little thing is insensible!"

Mrs. Simmons started to her feet.

"I don't believe it!" she exclaimed; but there was a curious white streak across her forehead, and a terrified light in her



eyes, as she hurried to Gratia's side. "I dare say it's only one o' them 'leptic fits," said she, glancing guiltily around. "These obstinate children are all the very mischief for fits, and I never had one to deal with as obstinate as Flora Elwell. Get me the camphor and hartshorn, you Grace. Open the window, some one."

But all efforts to resuscitate the child proved unavailing, and Hannah, the refractory chambermaid, was sent in hot haste for a doctor.

"Plague take the young one!" said Mrs. Simmons. "And just as missis is gone out for her drive in the park. There! she's beginning to come to a little now. I wish I hadn't been so hasty in sending Hannah; these doctors always ask such a sight of questions. I suppose I've got to take her to the company nursery."

"Why?" asked Gratia, fixing her clear eyes full upon the nurse's repulsive face.

"Why?" echoed Mrs. Simmons, contemptuously. "Why do you always take the best bedroom to be sick in, and wear your prettiest nightcap when the doctor comes? Help me with her, quick, and don't let's have any more silly questions."

The "company nursery" was a large, handsome room in the main building of the house, with a richly patterned Brussels carpet, rosewood cribs, fitted up with pearl-white linen and snowy Marseilles spreads, and toys scattered around in liberal profusion. Mrs. Moultrie's own two children were out driving with their mother, and there was, at present, no occupant of the luxurious apartment.

As Mrs. Simmons laid Flora in one of the cozy little nests of fine linen and lace, the child groaned slightly—the first evidence she had given of life.

"There's a bruise on her forehead," said the nurse, sponging away at the little blue-veined temples with more energy than gentleness. "I'll bet anything she's gone and fell against the edge of the door. Hush—is that the doctor? Oh, doctor"—



as a fine-looking, middle-aged man crossed the threshold—"it's such a relief to see you here. Dear little Flora's very poorly."

The doctor sat down beside the crib, felt the child's pulse, and examined her critically.

"Doctor," cried Mrs. Simmons, "you don't think——"

"I think she is very ill—much more so than you have any idea of," said the doctor. "You should have sent for me before."

Hannah, the chambermaid, was standing on the threshold of the up-stairs nursery, with the tears running down her cheeks, as Gratia came toward it.

"You needn't tell me what the doctor said," she broke out, passionately. "I know well enough that Flora's going to die—little merry-hearted Flora, that was the flower of the whole flock. They've killed her, between 'em—that's what they've done! Don't *I* remember what she was when she first came here, with that pious, canting old grandmother of hers, that couldn't spare time from camp-meetings and church-going to bring up her own flesh and blood. It's murder, that's just what it is, and poor little Aleck's worse off yet!"

"Why do you stay here then?" Gratia asked, gravely.

"Because I can't help myself—that's why. I've been in sore need of money once or twice, and Mrs. Moultrie's lent it to me, and now I am in her toils for good and all. But I warn you to take my advice and clear out as soon as ever you decently can."

"And leave these poor little ones?"

"That's been one thing that's kept me here," cried Hannah, throwing her frilled white apron over her head. "It's little I can do, anyway, but once in a while I get a chance to help the poor things, in an underhand way, and that's a sort of comfort to me. Oh, poor little Flo! she was like a daisy when first she came here, but no one would know her now."

"Perhaps she may get better," said Gratia, soothingly.



"She'll never be better," said Hannah, "and it's just as well she shouldn't be. Anywhere, to get out of *this* place."

The words proved true.

The next day Hannah helped to dress little Flora Elwell for the grave, in flowers scarcely whiter than her own attenuated cheeks, and her yellow hair carefully combed out and curled.

There was a showy casket, and a profusion of flowers and white satin ribbon, and Mrs. Moultrie indulged in a great show of sentimental sorrow as they carried the poor little child out of the prison-house whence death had released her.

Gratia was sitting in the nursery, with Aleck in her lap, when Mrs. Simmons returned to her own proper domains. Some resemblance, real or fancied, between the child and her own little brother, Raymond, had established him firmly in her heart. So shocked had she been at the systematic neglect and cruelty practiced in the "Maternal Home," that she would have been tempted to leave Mrs. Moultrie's house at once, had it not been for the hold little Aleck had already gained upon her affections.

"See, Hannah!" she said one day to the chambermaid, "how much brighter and better he looks."

Hannah shook her head.

"It's all your fancy, Grace," she said. "They drummed the poor wits he had out of his head long before you came here—Simmons and a German nurse-girl that was worse than she was. I wouldn't try to keep him here if I was you. It's no kindness."

"Hannah!" Gratia gathered the child into her arms with a scared look.

"I'm in earnest, and I mean it," said Hannah. "You see, I've lived longer in the world than you have, Grace."

Gratia remained nearly three months at the Maternal Home; she might have remained longer, had not the sole tie that kept her there been relaxed by little Aleck's death, and she had at least the satisfaction of knowing that his last days were sweetened by her constant care and tenderness.

The simple funeral took place from the Maternal Home—



Aleck White's mother being in Europe, traveling with her second husband, who was some eight or ten years younger than herself; and Mrs. Moultrie wrote a long eight-page letter to the bereaved parent, in which she satisfactorily proved that her child had walked the path of roses to his death, and sent in a prodigious bill for medical attendance, nursing, and posthumous expenses.

She was yet engaged in the preparation of this flowing piece of epistolary composition, when Gratia entered the room with flushed cheek and sparkling eyes.

"Mrs. Moultrie," she said, "Mrs. Simmons is sending Georgie to bed in the dark room, without any supper, because he accidentally broke her spectacles."

Mrs. Moultrie looked up, abstractedly biting the handle of her elegant gold pen.

"Very careless of George," she mildly observed.

"But he is such a little child, ma'am; and he has had nothing to eat since noon. It is cruel."

"Nurse Simmons is the best judge of that," said Mrs. Moultrie, with a ring of impatience in her tone.

"But, Mrs. Moultrie——"

"I would prefer no further discussion of the subject," said Mrs. Moultrie, in a voice as smooth as a flute, and harder than adamant. "I make it a rule never to interfere with Nurse Simmons' discipline."

"But she is cruel—wicked—tyrannical!" cried Gratia. "I cannot bear to stand by and see her oppress those poor, helpless children."

Mrs. Moultrie opened a gilt-edged memorandum-book, bound in mother-of-pearl.

"Let us see," she said, sweetly; "you have been here three months next Tuesday. Well, we will stretch a point and call it three months. Here are your wages."

"Do you mean to dismiss me?"

"I do."



Gratia took the roll of clean, rustling bills, and turned silently away. Homeless though she was, she felt that she would rather lodge in the streets than be longer sheltered under the roof which contained hearts like those of Mrs. Moultrie and her grim functionary, Nurse Simmons.

---

## CHAPTER XII.

### GOING TO LONG BRANCH.

Half an hour afterward Hannah Ingram came up into the chamber which the two girls mutually occupied at night, and found Gratia packing her few simple belongings.

“Going, eh?” said Hannah. “Well, I always supposed it would come to this. The only wonder is that you staid so long. Oh, dear! I wish I was going too, but I owe Madam Moultrie too much money. Where are you going?”

“I don’t know, Hannah,” Gratia answered, despairingly. “Anywhere away from here.”

“Haven’t you any friends?”

Gratia shook her head.

“Nor any place to go to?”

“No.”

“Well, now I’ll tell you what,” said Hannah. “If you want another situation——”

“I must get one or I shall starve,” said Gratia, in a hard, suppressed voice.

“Then maybe I can help you to one,” said Hannah. “I’ve got a cousin living chambermaid and waitress, and help with the fine washing and ironing, in as nice a family as ever was; fourteen dollars a month, and not much to do. And she’s to be married in a few days, and you can step right into her shoes.”

Gratia’s wan face brightened.

“Where is it?”



"They live on Twenty-sixth street, mostly, but they've got a cottage at Long Branch for the summer season. Any one can direct you to Mrs. Walbridge's. Mary Ann has told me it's one of the prettiest cottages there, just on the edge of the sea-shore."

"I should like that," said Gratia. "I never saw the sea."

"Then all I've got to do is to give you a line to Mary Ann," said Hannah.

And Gratia left the house in good time, thanks to Hannah's expedition. She would have liked to visit the nursery once more, and kiss the little ones good-by, but Mrs. Simmons resolutely interposed her veto to this.

"I don't want no fretting nor whimperieg," said that Roman matron, "and I've seen quite enough of you, Grace, as it is."

Gratia reached Long Branch just before sundown, and on presenting herself at Mrs. Walbridge's cottage, found a dismantled look about the whole place, as if the household gods were on the wing. To Grace's modest inquiry for Mrs. Walbridge, a fat, elderly woman replied :

"She's at home—yes ; but unless your business is very urgent, miss, you'll have to excuse seeing her. The family leaves for Europe day after to-morrow."

To Gratia Kempfield this item of information was like a stunning blow. She stood pale and startled.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" the woman asked, kindly. "You look tired."

If she had shut the door in Gratia's face, the girl might have gone away, carrying her burden of desolation as best she might. But there was something in the kindly sympathy of the good old cook's voice that touched the hidden spring of tears in the heart of the forlorn young wanderer.

"Dear me, child, what is the matter?" she asked. "Tell me quick, for I haven't much time to spare. What is your business with Mrs. Walbridge?"



In answer, Gratia presented the letter of introduction she had received from her friend, Hannah Ingram.

"Mary Ann has gone away ; she was to be married to-morrow," said the woman. "Shall I read the letter?"

"If you please, ma'am," said Gratia, dejectedly.

"It is too bad," she said, after reading the words in which Hannah recommended the young stranger to her relative. "But, you see, this notice of going to Europe was very sudden—Mrs. Walbridge only determined on it a week ago—and, of course, we shut up the house while we're gone, and my daughter—she's married to the gardener—lives in one of the basement rooms, and keeps an eye on things. There wouldn't be no place for you, fix it how you would. I wouldn't cry so, though ; *that* won't mend matters."

"But I cannot help it," sobbed Gratia. "I was so certain of finding a home here."

"I know of a good place you could get, as assistant chambermaid at the Ocean Wave Hotel, if I choose to give you my recommendation. You would have plenty to do, but then you would get good wages for it."

"I would always be grateful to you," murmured Gratia, her eyes speaking more eloquently than did her voice.

At about nine o'clock Gratia accompanied the old woman in a moonlight walk along the shore to the Ocean Wave Hotel, where Mrs. Burket presented her to the favorable consideration of Miss Lavinia Peckering, the housekeeper.

The upshot of their deliberations was that Gratia Kempfield was formally installed next morning as one of the numerous staff of chambermaids in the Ocean Wave Hotel at Long Branch.



## CHAPTER XIII.

IDA FALCONER.

It was the beginning of the season at Long Branch, and the Ocean Wave Hotel was full of pleasure seekers and health worshipers. Gratia found her duties light and pleasant, and began thoroughly to enjoy the variety by which she was perpetually surrounded.

“Chambermaid!”

The door of No. 32 was pushed slightly open, and its occupant, the pale young mother of half a dozen unruly little children, beckoned to Gratia, who was sweeping off the back veranda. She laid down her broom, and went to attend to the summons.

“Yes, ma’am—what can I do for you?”

Gratia was a general favorite among the guests at the Ocean Wave. Her cheerful buoyancy and merry alacrity, her willingness to oblige, and unvarying sweetness of temper, would have secured kind feeling toward her everywhere. Mrs. Champion looked almost envyingly at her.

“You are always so rosy,” she said, with a sigh. “I wish I was as healthy and light-hearted. Here, Grace, take this pitcher down to the shore and bring it to me full of salt water. The doctor says Minnie must have a sponge bath in sea-water every morning.”

Minnie, a pale, rickety child of thirteen or fourteen months, lay among the pillows of her crib; but even she smiled a faint smile as Gratia passed her by.

The fashionable hour of bathing had not yet come, and the children and nurses had almost undisputed possession of the beach, as Gratia descended the flight of wooden stairs, leading



from the esplanade to the shore. Close to where Gratia stood waiting for her pitcher of sea-water, a stylish nurse-maid, in a flounced muslin dress, a broad, striped sash, and a fluted muslin cap, was carrying on a flirtation with a bather.

"Indeed, Miss Natalie, it's true," he asserted. "This air does give you the most charming color!"

"Oh, I know just how much to believe of what you men say!" asserted Natalie, with a coquettish flirt of the parasol she held. "I've been before where—mercy on us! What's that?"

"That" was a wild, choking cry from the surf. The little lame child, who had been placed under the tender guardianship of Miss Natalie, had strayed farther and farther down the shingly, sloping floor of the beach, until she had been thrown down by the violence of a heavier billow than had hitherto rolled shoreward, and now lay shrieking at the mercy of the merciless tides.

"Oh, good gracious!" screamed Natalie, wringing her hands. "She's drowned! she's drowned!"

The bather sprang toward the spot with a smothered cry, but Gratia was before him. Heedless of her own light summer clothing, and the cruel, chilly rush of the waves, which flung tides of surf over her, she had rushed into the water and caught the child—a little girl of seven or eight years old—in her arms, and boldly stemmed the receding wave.

"Hush!" she murmured, soothingly, to the screaming child; "hush, dear—you are quite safe now. See, we are clear up on the shore, and now I'll take you to the hotel for some nice, warm, dry clothes. Tell me which your room is."

"I'm Ida," said the child, through her hysterical sobs. "Where is Natalie? Natalie told me not to bother when I asked her to come, too. Oh, I thought I was drowned!"

It takes very little to create a sensation at a place like Long Branch, and in a second almost, as it seemed, the shores, that had seemed comparatively deserted, were all a-swarm. The wild rumor that "a child was drowned" had somehow swept



through the verandas and walks, and before Natalie could snatch her terrified charge from Gratia's arms, the little girl's father, a tall, handsome man, with jet black eyes and hair, had interposed.

"Is *this* the care you take of my little lame darling, girl?" he angrily demanded of the nurse-girl.

"Oh, papa, papa!" sobbed little Ida. "I was drowned, and I screamed so loud, and the cold water came all over my neck."

"My treasure," murmured the father, letting his face droop for an instant over his child's, to conceal the emotion he could not repress.

"It was not my fault, sir," exclaimed Natalie, all in a tremble. "Miss Ida *would* go down close to the waves, and when I called her back she would not come."

"You told me not to bother," said Ida, innocently. "No, papa, I won't go back to Natalie; I don't like Natalie! Let the other girl carry me—the nice girl with the bright eyes."

And she held out her arms confidently to Gratia.

The young girl came forward and took the slender form of the little creature. Natalie would have pushed her away.

"It is *my* business to carry my young lady," she said, insolently.

"Don't, Natalie—you hurt me," wailed Ida, as the flounced maid tried to wrest her from Gratia's arms.

The gentleman turned sternly to the girl.

"You are discharged from my service, Natalie," he said, sternly. "Your neglect of your duty, too long overlooked, has now nearly caused a fatal result. Miss Ida Falconer has no further need of such care as yours. This young person," turning to Gratia with something of an appealing look in his eyes, "will, I dare say, take care of you until we are able to se-



cure a more trustworthy maid than Natalie has proved herself."

Gratia colored high with shy gratification, as she turned to carry little Ida to the hotel, murmuring a word or two of assent.

"What's your name?" asked Ida, gravely.

"Gratia Kempfield."

"Gratia—Gratia!" repeated the little girl. "It's a pretty name. I like it. I like *you*, Gratia. I wish you'd stay and be my nurse."

Gratia hardly knew what response to make to this startling overture.

"Perhaps your mamma wouldn't like it," said she.

"Oh, I haven't got any mamma," said Ida, innocently. "Didn't you know it? My mamma died when I was a *lee-tle*, *tee-ny* baby. If I'd had a mamma, she wouldn't have let me fall down the area steps and hurt my leg so I have to walk with a crutch. Oh, dear!"—with sudden remembrance—"and my crutch is gone, too. It's lost in the water."

"Never mind," said Gratia; "you can easily get another one."

At this moment the father of the child joined them, and took Ida in his own strong, tender arms.

"My jewel," he whispered, softly, "my little, dark-eyed lamb, whom I had so nearly lost. It makes me tremble when I think of the danger you have so narrowly escaped."

"Papa, don't cry, faltered Ida, herself moved to new tears through the impulse of sympathy. "I was 'most drowned, but Gratia pulled me out of the water. Papa, can Gratia be my nurse now?"

The gentleman colored and looked a little embarrassed. Gratia comprehended his dilemma in an instant.

"I am one of the chambermaids at the Ocean Wave, sir," she said, herself turning scarlet. "I happened by good fortune to be on the shore at the moment when——"



"That settles the matter," said Colonel Falconer, "if you would consent to fill the position of my little girl's attendant, at least for a few days, until we can replace the woman whose criminal neglect had so nearly proved fatal."

"Do, Gratia! We'll have such nice times together!" whispered Ida, patting her new friend's cheek. "*Please*, Gratia."

"But I am afraid I should not be able to give satisfaction," hesitated Gratia, who had caught chance peeps afar off of the Falconer family as one of the wealthiest and most stylish who were staying at the Ocean Wave Hotel.

"We will risk that," said Colonel Falconer, kindly. "That is, if you really are not unwilling to undertake the charge of Ida."

"Oh, sir," said Gratia, artlessly. "I should be delighted!"

"I am so glad, papa!" chirped Ida.

And this was our young heroine's first promotion in the ladder of life.

All this time they had been hurrying up the wooden steps, and across the lawn, and now stood opposite the door of No. 100, which Colonel Falconer threw open and entered without further ceremony.

---

## CHAPTER XIV.

### WINNING HER WAY.

Hugo Falconer was a widower of about two and thirty years, exceedingly handsome, after the dark, Spanish style, with large dark eyes, hair thick, glossy, and so black that it caught a purplish tint in the shadow, and he was one of the partners in a large banking-house on Wall street—Miller, Falconer & Co. The senior member of the firm was a rich bachelor uncle, Ralph Miller, by name, who was also staying at the Ocean Wave, with his sister and her family. He was a short, bald-



headed gentleman of about fifty-five, with keen blue eyes, a nose like an eagle's beak, and the dictatorial manner which belongs, however unconsciously, to the rich man who has yet to choose his heirs. All the Falconer family, with the single exception of his nephew, Hugo, were in awe of Uncle Ralph and enacted the affectionately subservient. Was it to be wondered at that he acquired a degree of arrogance in his bearing and manner?

Mrs. Falconer was a lady who all her life had made great show upon little foundation, and always contrived to outlive her income. Perhaps, as Uncle Ralph surlily insisted, it was natural to her; if she had had the income of the Baroness Rothschild she would still have spent a few sovereigns more per annum; perhaps, on the other hand, it was owing entirely to the fact of that income having been comparatively small. She had married a dashing, handsome man, who had spent her little fortune, and died leaving her penniless. Hugo, her eldest child, had entered the arena of business life at a very early age, and proved eminently successful therein. He had married and was left a widower when young, but throughout his whole financial career he had uniformly made his mother a liberal allowance, upon which she shone at watering-places and fashionable haunts. In New York she kept Uncle Ralph Miller's house for him—a splendid mansion on Fifth avenue, which afforded a luxurious home for herself and her family.

She had two other children besides Hugo—Robert, a son of about twenty-two, who pretended to be studying law, but in reality, did nothing most persistently. He was a handsome young blonde, as unlike Hugo as it was possible for two brothers to be. As for intellect, he might have had a commanding one, but up to the present date it had not developed itself.

Alberta Falconer, the youngest of the family, was a brunette of twenty, a thorough New York girl, with dashing manners, showy accomplishments, and plenty of confidence in her own



ability and talent. As Robert Falconer depended on his Uncle Ralph for the advancement of his future fortunes, so Alberta had been educated to scheme and maneuver for a rich husband as the goal of all her hopes. Mrs. Falconer had brought her only daughter up in extravagant habits and tastes, and her only hope of ever being able to indulge them completely was through the "coming man."

"Hugo is always preaching economy, and Uncle Ralph is shamefully stingy!" declared the young lady. "But if I can only marry as I mean to, I'll show them!"

Alberta was simply fine-looking. Her eyes and hair were black, but her features were rather coarse, her complexion poor, and her teeth too large for her mouth. All that art could achieve or dress secure to atone for these deficiencies, was, however, brought to the rescue, and Miss Falconer had the satisfaction of making a sensation wherever she went.

And this was the family into which Gratia Kempfield was now introduced as the chosen attendant of Colonel Falconer's motherless little daughter. Ida, an impulsive and affectionate child, spoiled by every one, and allowed her own way to a ruinous degree, in consequence of her lameness, became devotedly attached to the new nurse, and would notice or obey no one else.

"Come, darling," said Mrs. Falconer, in a honeyed voice, one bright morning, "go with the other little girls down to dig sand. Here is your pail and spade. Papa thinks you stay too much indoors. Come, sweet!"

Ida, who was coiled up on a cushion by the window, with a nest of pillows at her back and a book in her lap, looked up.

"I sha'n't!" said she, independently. "Don't tease, grandmother."

"Come," insisted Mrs. Falconer; "you really ought to go out this charming morning."

But Ida still shook her jetty curls.



"No," said she, "I shall stay and read the story of 'Cinderella and the Little Glass Slipper' to Gratia, while she is mending my stockings."

"There it is," said Alberta, "that Gratia has just spoiled the child. Natalie was a great deal more judicious with her."

"Dused good taste the little puss has," observed Robert, who was lounging on a sofa. "I wouldn't mind reading aloud 'Cinderella and the What's-its-Name' myself. She's as pretty as a blue-bell, that little Gratia."

"Robert," said Mrs. Falconer, reprovingly, "I am astonished at you!"

"What for, mother? Don't you suppose I have any eyes in my head? She *is* pretty. Rynders, the artist, said, only yesterday, that she had a head like a Madonna."

"Artists are priviledged to be eccentric," observed Alberta. "And she is such a mere child!"

"She is sixteen," said Ida, "and I love her, oh, so much!"

Alberta signaled to her brother not to pursue the subject further.

"Little pitchers have big ears," she said.

"I know you mean me," said Ida. "And I know Aunt Alberta doesn't like Gratia, because she has got pink cheeks and such pretty white teeth. But *I* like her—and papa likes her."

"The mischief he does!" whistled Robert Falconer.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Gratia," Ida said, when the two were alone that afternoon, by their own special veranda door, "what is a Madonna?"

"Why?"

"Because Mr. Rynders says you are like one."

Gratia turned scarlet.

"He means an old picture, Ida. When did he say so?"

"I don't know; I didn't hear him; Uncle Robert told Aunt Alberta so."

Ida was restless and sleepless that night.



"Oh, Gratia, I can't sleep," pleaded the child. "The moon shines so bright and the music sounds so sweet. "Let's go and peep into the windows and see them dance." For one of the first "hops" of the season was in progress.

And Gratia, not unwilling to catch a fleeting glance at the show of fashion as it careered by, dressed the little girl in a loose, white wrapper and tied a pink satin hood over her head, and they went out on the balcony.

There was a crowd round the open parlor casements, but Gratia Kempfield and her little charge contrived, through the good office of one of the waiters, to secure a cozy nook where, themselves unseen, they could watch the waltzers whisk by to the inspiring strains of the band.

"Gratia!" exclaimed the child, almost involuntarily, after they had been looking at the dancers for some time, "why don't *you* go in and dance? There is not a girl there so pretty as you are."

Gratia smiled and blushed.

"You think so, because you love me, Ida," she returned.

"No, it's really so," gravely pronounced the little critic. "You are a great deal prettier than my Aunt Albertâ, who has so many bouquets, and drives, and beaus. Uncle Rob said last week that you would be a beauty if you only had opportunity. What does opportunity mean?"

"What I haven't got, and never shall have," merrily responded Gratia. "Come, Ida, it's getting late, and we must go back to our nest again."

Ida climbed obediently down from her seat; somehow she never thought of rebelling against Gratia's gentle decrees.

"But I'm not sleepy," she insisted; "I can't go to sleep, unless you lie down on the bed beside me, and sing about the little child—Jesus—in the manger."

"I will, then," said Gratia, drawing the child's arm through hers.

And Gratia, with her cheek on the same pillow as Ida's,



murmured the cradle songs she had been used to sing to Raymond until the little girl fell fast asleep, with her coral lips apart, and one hand tightly grasping Gratia's.

But the young girl did not forget Ida's words :

“ There is not a girl there so pretty as you are.”

“ She knew it ; she could not but realize it, day after day, as she looked into the glass, and saw the plain, unvarnished reflection of her own face.

“ Opportunity !” thought Gratia to herself, as she sat looking out at the moonlight on the waves, after the child was asleep. “ Yes, that is the one thing that I lack. Yet how wrong it is of me to repine, when I am laying by a little money for Raymond every month.”

And she set herself to consider how many weeks, and months, and years it must be before she could redeem her promise to come and take Raymond away from Almira Kempfield's unbending rule.

---

## CHAPTER XV.

### AN UPWARD STEP IN THE WORLD.

“ So you like Gratia Kempfield better than you did Natalie Browne, Ida ?” said Colonel Falconer, one evening.

“ Oh, yes, papa,” cried Ida, joyously ; “ I'm perfectly happy now.”

But the current of Ida Falconer's life was not destined to run quite so smoothly always. The Long Branch season was not half over when the poor little creature fell ill of a slow fever—a wasting, cruel disease, which brought her tiny feet close to the gates of the grave. And in those nights of pain, those days of weary watching, Gratia seemed to be drawn nearer than ever to her little charge. No one was so patient, so unwearied, so gentle as Gratia, shrinking from none of the numerous exac-



tions of the child-invalid ; and when, at last, after many a sickening fluctuation between hope and fear, Ida was pronounced to be out of danger, the physician frankly told Colonel Falconer that, under Providence, it was to the young nurse's care that he owed his child's life.

After this, Ida became more passionately devoted than ever to Gratia Kempfield ; but the anomalous position in which this placed the young nurse, was sometimes not a little annoying.

It was a lovely evening in August, and Mr. Miller's open barouche had been ordered around to take the ladies for a drive.

"It's a beautiful afternoon for the shore road," said Alberta. "Mamma, suppose we call for Mrs. Verschoyle to go with us?"

Mrs. Falconer agreed to the proposition, as she established herself snugly on the cushions of the back seat, with Ida next to her, and Alberta sitting opposite.

"Go on, Server !" said Miss Falconer, authoritatively, to the driver. But at the same moment Ida called out :

"Gratia ! Where is Gratia ?"

"Stop, Server !" cried Alberta. "What on earth do you want of the girl, Ida ?"

"To go with us," said the child, with the exacting imperiousness due to convalescence. "I won't go unless Gratia goes, too."

"My *dear* child !" reasoned her grandmother ; "we are going for a drive on the shore road with Mrs. Verschoyle."

"I don't care," fretted Ira ; "I don't like Mrs. Verschoyle, and I want Gratia. Let me get out !"

Mrs. Falconer looked appealingly at her daughter.

"What are we to do, Alberta ?"

"Horrid little petulant thing !" muttered Alberta, with no very amiable expression on her face. "Let her get out if she chooses !"

"But Hugo makes such a point of her having a drive in the fresh air every day, and Uncle Ralph does so spoil the child !"



“And here are the consequences of the whole system !” said Alberta, angrily. “If *you* choose, mamma, to go trailing through Long Branch with a servant maid stuck up in the carriage with you, you may do so—I won’t !”

“I don’t care whether you do or not, Aunt Alberta,” said Ida, saucily. “I love Gratia, and I don’t love you. I *will* have Gratia in the carriage.”

“Ida, Ida !” remonstrated Gratia, who had heard every word of the discussion from her place by the door. But Ida refused utterly to be appeased or quieted, and Alberta sprang out of the carriage with a countenance of indescribable disgust.

“You had better get in, *Miss* Gratia,” she said, insolently emphasizing the prefix. “I shall remain at home.”

Gratia hesitated ; the scarlet blood rushed hotly to her cheeks ; she did not move.

“Gratia !” called the child, holding out both hands. “Grand-mamma, tell her to come.”

“Get in, Gratia,” said Mrs. Falconer, shortly, speaking with a suppressed voice. “The child must have her way, I suppose, but”—and she compressed her lips—“there will have to be a stop to this sort of thing. I must speak to my son Hugo.”

It may readily be supposed that, after this, the airing was not particularly pleasant to Gratia, although Ida was in the highest of spirits, and chatted merrily away as the luxuriously cushioned carriage rolled along the thronged road.

“Oh, grandmamma, look !” she cried ; “there is Mr. Fenwick, with all the children ; and Miss Allie Thorpe on horseback ; and there goes Mr. Ardenham. Oh, see ! he is bowing to Gratia ; he thinks she is Aunt Alberta.”

The child broke into a laugh as she spoke, but Mrs. Falconer’s brow darkened, and Gratia felt her face burn.

“Mr. Ardenham is perhaps not aware,” said Mrs. Falconer, speaking in measured accents, “that in our family the nurse-maid not unfrequently usurps the place of the young lady.”



"I know what that means," cried Ida, after a moment's grave consideration. "Uncle Bob told me. It's one who takes a place that doesn't belong to him. King Richard the Third, in my 'Child's History of England,' was a *usurper*."

Mrs. Falconer did not reply, but the lesson was not lost on Gratia. She felt herself, through no fault of her own, placed in a false position, and the chain of circumstances galled her cruelly.

"Home, Server!" called out Mrs. Falconer, before they had half completed the proposed route.

The coachman turned round on his box, with wide-open mouth.

"I thought we was goin' all the way round, ma'am?"

"Home!" sharply repeated his mistress, and Server felt that there was to be no appeal from the decision.

Mrs. Falconer watched for the home-coming of her son with more than ordinary anxiety that night, and when he came, arm-in-arm with Mr. Miller, she beckoned him into her room.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Where is Ida?"

"In her own room with Gratia. Hugo, I want to speak to you."

"And I want to speak to you also, mother; but go on. Ladies first, always."

"It's about that nurse-girl of Ida's, Hugo. She is really too insolent and presuming to be tolerated."

"I do not think so, mother," said Hugo Falconer, gravely. "To me she seems remarkably modest and unassuming."

"To me, also," said Mr. Miller, who sat by the window, smoking.

"She seems quite to have won the hearts of you gentlemen," said Mrs. Falconer, bitterly.

"Ida is very fond of her," remarked Uncle Ralph.

"Ida is a spoiled child," and then Mrs. Falconer proceeded to relate the occurrences of the afternoon.



"So very embarrassing," said she, fanning herself, and out of breath from the vehemence with which she had spoken.

"I do not see it at all," said Mr. Miller, coolly. "If Ida was determined she should go, I do not suppose it would have hurt Alberta to remain at home, for once."

"And you do not think Gratia to blame?"

"Not at all."

"Oh, if *that* is the way you are going to take it," said Mrs. Falconer, angrily, then it is no use in talking further. My remonstrances are quite thrown away, and Ida's nurse is to have everything her own way."

"I never thought she was at all inclined to presume," said Colonel Falconer, dryly.

"Of course not," said his mother, fanning herself more energetically than ever. "There *was* a time, once, when my opinion was of some value in the family."

"And there still is, mother, I hope," said Colonel Falconer, good-humoredly. "But——"

"But," interposed Mr. Miller, "you don't ask Hugo what news he brings?"

"News?" echoed Mrs. Falconer. "What do you mean, Ralph?"

"Only that Hugo is going to Europe next week."

"To Europe? To stay there?"

Mrs. Falconer had forgotten all her grievance in this astounding morsel of information.

"For months, if not for years," said her son, quietly. "I have anticipated this move for some time, and our business at last renders it necessary that either Uncle Ralph or I should go. I am the younger person of the two, so to my lot it falls. I shall start on Tuesday next."

Mrs. Falconer sat breathless and astonished.

"And Ida?"

"Ida will remain with you and Alberta for the present, at least. The allowance I shall make her will, I trust, help you



along in your household expenses, and I think I may depend on your loving custody of my little treasure."

Mrs. Falconer murmured something about Hugo always having been more than generous, and her own consciousness and appreciation of the trust reposed in her, but he interrupted the partially completed sentence.

"And before I go, mother, I have determined to put at once into execution a plan which I have long had in contemplation. I mean to give my solitary child a sister and a companion."

Mrs. Falconer stared, and breathed quickly. Could it be possible that her son contemplated the, to her, distasteful step of marrying again, after all the years which he had dwelt a contented widower? But his next words entirely dissipated this half-formed idea, and replaced it with a certainty which was, "if possible, more odious" still.

"I intend to adopt Gratia Kempfield as my daughter, and Ida's sister," slowly uttered Colonel Falconer.

"Hugo!" almost shrieked his mother, "you surely are not in earnest?"

"Yes, I am. Why should I not be?"

"A girl like that—a nameless, homeless creature—the mere scum of the gutters——"

"Stop a minute, mother, if you please," said Hugo, calmly. "Nameless and homeless she is no longer. I have endowed her with my name and my home. The 'scum of the gutters'—to use words which I must confess I never expected to hear from my mother's lips—she never has been. The mere fact that I wish and intend to make her my daughter's companion, is sufficient proof of that, I should think."

He spoke with a certain stern dignity of manner, before which Mrs. Falconer quailed.

"Ralph," she exclaimed, turning, as a last resort, to her brother, "what do *you* think of this?"

"Humph!" observed the old bachelor, slowly removing his



cigar from between his lips ; “ I think, in the first place, it is none of my business ; and in the second place, I must say that I approve of Hugo’s decision, and I think he has done a very wise thing.”

Mrs. Falconer drew a long breath of despair and dismay.

“ What will Alberta say ? ” she exclaimed.

“ It matters little what she says,” Colonel Falconer responded.

“ But of this I wish you would warn her, mother—she must be more circumspect in her manner toward my adopted daughter than she has chosen to be toward Gratia Kempfield. You will remember this ? ”

Mrs. Falconer winced, but Hugo was too important a person in the family, especially as regarded financial matters, to be thwarted, and she was forced unwillingly to accede to his request. Uncle Ralph and his nephew were both agreed on this point, and the dashing widow was in a minority.

She was relieved at this moment by the entrance of Alberta herself.

“ Here she is herself,” said Mrs. Falconer. “ Alberta, we were just speaking of you. Hugo wishes you to be particularly agreeable and polite to a young lady” (politic though she was, Mrs. Falconer could not suppress the spiteful intonation of her voice here) “ whom he has chosen to adopt as his daughter.”

“ Who is it ? ” eagerly demanded Alberta.

“ Gratia Kempfield.”

“ Impossible, mamma ! ” cried Alberta, incredulously. “ Hugo never would be so mad—so quixotic ! ”

“ It is not only possible, my dear sister,” said Colonel Falconer, quietly, “ but it is a fact to which you may as well reconcile yourselves now, as at any time. Gratia is to be my eldest child—that is, if she consents. I have not yet divulged my plans to her, but I shall proceed to do so at once.”

“ Oh, she will consent readily enough, you may be quite



sure of that," said Mrs. Falconer, tossing her head, while Alberta still stood in speechless indignation and amazement.

"Where is she?" asked Colonel Falconer.

"With Ida, I suppose; the child seems bewitched to have her close at her side the whole time."

"Shows good taste," dryly remarked Uncle Ralph.

And when Gratia Kempfield closed her eyes that night it was no longer as the paid drudge, the penniless menial who was at every one's beck and call, but as the adopted daughter of the wealthy and aristocratic Colonel Hugo Falconer, and little Ida's cherished sister.

"I am so glad, darling Gratia!" repeated the child, over and over. "I was always so lonesome without a sister, and now I've got one all to myself. Tell me, Gratia, aren't you glad?"

Glad? Gratia hardly knew. As yet she was scarcely able to acknowledge her own feelings.

"Take time to consider, Gratia," Colonel Falconer had kindly said to her. "That you have no friends to consult I am well aware, and that is one reason I have concluded to take this step. Ida's sister must give her whole heart and affection to Ida alone. Had you relatives or friends, I should never have adopted you."

The burning scarlet rushed to Gratia's brow. She had been on the point of telling him about Raymond, but these words effectually sealed her lips. The time had not yet come for the redemption of her promise to her little brother, but this very circumstance might bring it nearer with a swifter flight.

"I need no time to consider, sir," she said, in a low, tremulous voice. "I cannot but rejoice to accept your kind offer, if indeed you think me worthy to be called Ida's sister."

She spoke faintly and hesitatingly, and a sensation of remorse stung her heart. Was she deceiving Colonel Falconer? Was there a hidden treachery in her heart, unworthy of the noble nature which reposed such implicit trust in her? Surely not;



for the secret she kept from him was kept from the whole world also.

"Isn't it nice, Gratia?" little Ida had cried, when Colonel Falconer had left them. "You'll have splendid dresses now, like Aunt Alberta, and you and I will go in the carriage to select them, and you shall go to parties, and dance. And you will be so pretty, Gratia, and every one will fall in love with you, as the Prince did with Cinderella."

Gratia smiled at the child's enthusiastic prattle, but the words sank into her heart. After all, why should not they come true?

Her heart throbbed, and the bright tears sparkled in her eyes—tears of happy, tremulous anticipation—as she contemplated the radiant possibility.

"Dear little Raymond!" was her last thought, ere she fell asleep, long after midnight; "if he only could know!"

---

## CHAPTER XVI.

### GRATIA'S FIRST BALL

"How provoking!" cried Alberta Falconer, her brow flushing angrily, as she threw aside a mammoth pasteboard box which had just been delivered by an obsequious waiter at the door of her room, with a "Jes' come from New York, miss." "They have sent me a dress that the thinnest old maid in Long Branch couldn't squeeze into. Does Madame Finelli think I've got the consumption, or gone into a decline?"

Mrs. Falconer lifted up the dress, an exquisite lavender-colored crape, trimmed with festoons of black lace and lemon ribbon.

"What a pity!" she exclaimed. "Finelli must have let some of those blundering women cut from the wrong pattern."

"But I made her promise she would always fit *my* dresses herself," almost sobbed Alberta.



“As if such people ever kept their promises after your back was turned!” said Mrs. Falconer, contemptuously.

“At all events, I won’t pay her a cent for the dress!” fumed Alberta.

And she caught up the gold-bright folds, and tossed them away from her.

“Seems to me you are making a great fuss about a dress, Aunt Alberta,” said Ida, philosophically. “I heard Louissette say yesterday that you had fourteen ball dresses. I should think that you might at least find *one* fit to wear.”

“Louissette had better mind her own business,” said Alberta, sharply. “How does your dress look, Gratia?”

“It is beautiful!” Gratia returned quietly. For Colonel Falconer had left orders with Madame Finelli, the fashionable *modiste*, that his adopted daughter should have a wardrobe supplied her such as befitted a girl of sixteen, newly entering the gay world at Long Branch.

“Show it to Aunt Alberta,” cried Ida, eagerly. “It is so lovely!”

It *was* lovely—simple white lace, over dead white silk, the overskirt caught up in graceful folds by lilies of the valley, with polished green leaves half hiding the silvery bells, and a wreath of the same delicate white blossoms. Alberta surveyed it greedily.

“Finelli can trim exquisitely when she pleases,” she cried, with a sort of grudging enthusiasm. “That white silk would fit me exactly—I know it is just my pattern! Gratia,” with an affectation of cordiality, “why won’t you exchange, this once?”

“Exchange?” repeated Gratia, hardly catching her meaning at first.

“Yes—you could wear the lemon crape—you are so much more slender than I am—and it really would be quite becoming to you. Do, and I’ll let you wear the set of oriental topazes.”

I do not want to wear the topazes, Alberta.”

“Of course you don’t,” cried Alberta, turning abruptly away.



"Say at once that you don't mean to oblige me, and be done with it!"

"Oh, Alberta, it is not that!" said Gratia, rising and speaking in a stifled voice, as she laid her hand lightly on Alberta's arm. "You are welcome to the dress. I don't care whether I wear white or yellow. All I ask is that you will try to like me a little."

"You're a darling!" said Alberta, with a kiss that was like the peck of a bird's beak. She had won her object, and that was all she cared for. Circumstances rendered it desirable that she should at least keep an outward show of affection and cordial feeling toward her brother's adopted daughter; but the pill, however gilded, became daily more crusted over with bitterness. "And I dare say you can let out the seams of the crape dress, or something, and you've got one of those fortunate complexions which can wear anything."

In her secret heart Alberta thought she had achieved two objects in this exchange of ball dresses—secured an exquisite costume for herself and made over to Gratia, for this her first ball, a dress which would make her look like a fright.

In this last amiable aspiration, however, she was disappointed. The lemon-colored crape, which would have been trying to most complexions, made Gratia look like a delicate wild flower in the sunshine. Following her own instinct of propriety, she wore no jewels, only a cluster of yellow rosebuds in her hair, and a bow of ribbon at her throat.

"Here are your gloves," said Ida, "and here is your bouquet and fan. Oh, Gratia, how I wish I were big enough to go to the ball, too! But I shall make Louissette take me to the windows so I can peep in, as we did that moonlight night, you know."

"Pshaw!" said Alberta. "Louissette has my laces to do up, and you had a great deal better go to bed."

"But I sha'n't, though!" said Ida. "I couldn't sleep, I have got so excited watching you and Gratia dress."



"Shall I stay and sing you to sleep before I go, darling?" whispered Gratia. "I would just as soon."

"You had a great deal better," said Alberta, catching at the meaning of the whispered words, and eager to get a chance to enter the ball-room without her brother's adopted child."

"Indeed, you shall not!" cried Ida. "I want to see you in the ball-room."

At this moment Robert Falconer sauntered into the room in faultless evening dress.

"Almost ready, girls?" he said. "Upon my word"—with an admiring glance at Gratia—"that's a dused pretty dress of yours, Gratia. Why don't *you* ever pick out such a pretty color as that, Bertie?"

Ida burst out laughing.

"It's Aunt Alberta's dress," she cried, "only she couldn't wear it because it was too tight, and so Gratia exchanged with her."

"Very good-natured of Gratia, I'm sure," said Robert, patronizingly. "She's made a good thing by the exchange, I'm sure. "You'll give me the first waltz, won't you, Gratia?"

Gratia smiled and colored, till she looked more like a rose than ever.

"I do not know how to waltz," said she.

"The first quadrille, then. Come, is it a bargain?"

As they crossed the threshold of the brilliant ball-room, Gratia's memory went back to the moonlight evening, scarcely six weeks since, when she and little Ida had looked in at the glittering scene, as if it were a pageant in which she never could hope to participate. Now how changed was everything! With Gratia Kempfield, every faculty was sharpened by the peculiarity of the circumstances which surrounded her. She knew every advantage and disadvantage with which she was encompassed. When she had surveyed herself in the mirror that evening, she had been fully aware of her own rare, delicate beauty, and she



had looked upon it for the moment not as rose and lily, and pure curve of cheek and lip, but as a key wherewith to unlock the golden gates of success.

"Beauty has always swayed the world," she murmured ; "and I—what can I not accomplish if I am true to myself and to the one object of my life?"

There was a mournful worldliness in these thoughts, if one reflects that they surged through the bosom of a girl of sixteen ; but it must be borne in mind that Gratia Kempfield was older by far than her age in years. Self-dependence and trial had aged her in a proportion which figures can hardly express.

Her first evening in society was brilliantly successful, not only from her grace, and beauty, and extreme youth, but from a sort of *prestige* which surrounded her. The mystery which enveloped the antecedents of Colonel Hugo Falconer's adopted child had given rise to all manner of vague rumors. There was a something romantic and removed from the humdrum course of every-day events about the whole matter that made Gratia Kempfield—or Miss Falconer, as she was now called—an object of the warmest interest among the languid devotees of fashion, who so seldom found anything to be enthusiastic about.

Therefore, upon this, her *debut*, her ball-card was full, and her smiles courted by every one ; and little Ida, whose bright face peeped in at the open window, was delighted to witness her adopted sister's triumph.

"Don't she look pretty, Louissette?" she cried, to Alberta's French maid, who attended her. "Hasn't she got the sweetest face in all the room? Aunt Alberta is pretty, too ; but somehow Aunt Alberta looks old and dried up beside Gratia."

"You had better not let your aunt hear that opinion," said a voice behind her, and Ida felt Uncle Ralph's hand upon her curls.

"Uncle Ralph !" she exclaimed—"you here?"

"And why not I as well as you, little Miss Curiosity?" he said, good-humoredly.



"I shouldn't be here if I could go into the ball-room and dance," said Ida. "See, Uncle Raph! Doesn't Gratia look beautiful? Why don't you go in and ask her to dance? Do, Uncle Ralph."

"Do you suppose she would leave all her gay young cavaliers to dance with a grim old bachelor like me, Puss?" demanded Mr. Miller.

"I know she would," nodded Ida; "because she likes you. I've heard her say so."

Mr. Miller puffed silently away, but he was not displeased at Ida's *naïve* speech, that was quite evident.

"Please, Uncle Ralph," coaxed the child.

"No, Puss, I'm too old and stout for that sort of thing," said he, laughing. "But perhaps I'll take you girls for a nice long drive to-morrow, to take off the stamp of late hours. Carry your little lady off to bed now, Louissette; she has been up long enough."

So Ida was borne off, vainly pleading for "just one little minute longer."

---

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DOMESTIC DISSENSIONS.

But the cup of Gratia's social triumph was not destined to be entirely unmingled with the gall of bitterness.

The girls were out bathing one lovely morning. Ida in the charge of Louissette, who was a most careful and responsible woman, and Gratia and Alberta together. Miss Falconer did not like sea bathing, but she participated in it, simply because it was the fashion.

"One looks like a fright in these hideous straw-flats and oil-skin night-caps, and the figure of Venus de Medici herself would be swallowed up in a plaid flannel bathing suit."

"Oh, Alberta, said Gratia, innocently, "it is the most de-



lightful thing in the world to me, to feel the great, cool waves wrapping themselves round me."

"So you like it, Miss Gratia," said Mr. Ardenham's voice, close to them. "Don't you want to venture out far enough to touch the post?"

"Touching the post," as Gratia knew, was considered quite a feat among the naiads who frequented the beach, and she herself had more than once made her way out through the warring billows to lay her hand on the last post to which the rope was fastened.

"Yes," she answered, unhesitatingly.

"You will come too, Miss Falconer," said Mr. Ardenham, but the acute ear of Alberta detected a difference in the tone in which he had addressed herself and Gratia.

"Thank you," she answered, shrugging her shoulders, "I have no particular wish to risk my life for the mere satisfaction of saying I have touched the post."

"Come then," said Mr. Ardenham; and side by side he and Gratia ventured so far out into the ocean that Ida screamed aloud.

Five minutes afterward Gratia came laughing up the beach, wringing the salt water and bits of floating sea-weed out of her hair, from which the oil-silk cap had escaped.

"Where is Alberta?" she asked.

"Gone up to the hotel," said Ida.

Gratia Falconer, as we must now call her, looked lovelier than ever, as she came out of her room dressed in simple white muslin, with rose-colored ribbons run through every hem and puffing, and a knot of the same ribbon at her throat.

Mrs. Falconer sat waiting for Robert to come to take them in to dinner. She looked up as Gratia approached.

"Gratia," she said, "Alberta thinks—and I think also—that it is my duty to speak to you."

"To speak to me, ma'am?" Gratia repeated. "About what?"



“Don’t use that odious word ‘ma’am,’” Mrs. Falconer said, sharply. “If you must say anything, say ‘madam.’ One would think you never were going to forget that you had been a chambermaid!”

Gratia blushed a hot, fiery scarlet, but she said nothing, and, after a momentary pause, Mrs. Falconer, satisfied with the visible effect her envenomed arrow had produced, proceeded :

“To warn you, I mean, against the flirtation you are carrying on with Mr. Ardenham. Everybody at the Branch is talking about it!”

Gratia opened her eyes in amazement.

“Mrs. Falconer!”

“You need not flare up about it,” said the lady, drawing herself more erect. “I am only speaking for your own good.”

“But, Mrs. Falconer, I never dreamed of such a thing!”

“Nonsense!” interposed Alberta. “What were you doing in the starlight on the beach last night?—what were you doing when you must needs make a spectacle of yourself by ‘touching the post’ this very morning?”

“Not *flirting*!” Gratia cried, vehemently.

“It looks to me very like it,” said Alberta, tossing her head.

“But why should I flirt with him?” persisted innocent Gratia. “I do not care for him.”

And then she colored at the sound of her own words.

“It is well to have a good opinion of one’s self,” said Mrs. Falconer, dryly. “Most young ladies would consider Mr. Ardenham a remarkably good match.”

“I don’t mean that,” said Gratia, more and more embarrassed. “I only mean——”

At this moment a servant brought in a penciled card.

“Mr. Ardenham’s compliments to Miss Gratia Falconer, and would be happy to have the pleasure of driving her out this afternoon, at five o’clock.”



"There!" cried Alberta, who had deciphered the message over Gratia's shoulder. "I told you so!"

"What shall I say?" asked Gratia, irresolutely. "I do not see how I can avoid going."

"It's easy enough, if you choose," said Alberta. "Tell him you have another engagement."

"But it would not be true."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Falconer, angrily.

"And why should I decline a pleasant drive with Mr. Ardenham?" quietly persisted Gratia, who was beginning, in some measure, to rally herself from the unexpected attack which had been made upon her.

"For no reason at all," said Mrs. Falconer, her voice quivering with passion. "Of course there can be no harm in boldly deluding another girl's lover; it is done every day, I believe, and why not by you as well as any one else?"

"Whose lover?" asked Gratia, fixing her clear hazel eyes full on the flushed face of the indignant matron.

"Alberta's!" flashed back Mrs. Falconer.

"Mamma!" interposed the young lady, half vexed, half pleased.

"If that is the case," said Gratia, quietly, "matters are different. I will decline Mr. Ardenham's invitation in Alberta's favor."

"You will do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Alberta, uncertain whether Gratia was sarcastic or a fool. "Gratia Kempfield, if you dare——"

"I beg your pardon," said Gratia, calmly; "my name is Falconer."

Alberta dared not resent the words as she would have liked. She burst into angry tears.

"Perhaps Miss *Falconer* will be so good as to leave us now," said the elder lady, frigidly.

And Gratia obeyed, her cheeks aflame, and her heart angrily throbbing.

Robert Falconer met her on the threshold.



“By Jove, Gratia!” he cried, admiringly surveying her, “you ought always to wear white and pink; you look exactly like an apple-blossom. Don’t try to rush by me,” intercepting her with an outstretched hand. “I mean to take you into dinner, just for the fun of making all the other fellows envious. Come, mother. Bertie, come.”

But the door was bolted, and Mrs. Falconer’s sharp voice called out :

“We are not ready yet.”

“Then I shall go in with Gratia, and you can come in at your leisure,” observed the dutiful son.

And away he went, drawing Gratia’s reluctant arm through his own.

Mrs. Falconer embraced the first opportunity to remonstrate with her son.

“Robert,” said she, “you must be a little more circumspect.”

“Much obliged to you, mother,” said the young man, indifferently. “But why, may I make bold to ask?”

“People are beginning to make remarks about you and Gratia.”

“Who?” asked Robert, languidly.

“Everybody!” was the evasive answer.

“Everybody gives me credit, then, for remarkably good taste,” said Mr. Falconer, complacently stroking his light moustache. “She is the prettiest girl at the Branch.”

“Robert, you are not serious?”

“Never was more so in my life.”

“But she has not a penny besides what Hugo sees fit to allow her; and it is imperatively necessary, as you yourself know——”

“That I should marry rich. My dear mother, do you take me for an absolute fool? Can’t a fellow admire a pretty girl without marrying her?”

Mrs. Falconer was somewhat relieved at this view of the



affair; but all enjoyment of the season at Long Branch was over, so far as she was concerned.

Alberta's star of bellehood had nearly set, or, if it still shone, gave forth so feeble a glimmer that no satisfaction could be thereby obtained. All the bouquets, cards, and invitations to drive, ride, or walk, were for "Miss Gratia Falconer" now, instead of "Miss Falconer," as of old. Alberta, forced unwillingly into a sort of secondary position, began to weary of the sea-side gayeties, and to persecute Uncle Ralph to issue the fiat for the return to the city.

"It shall be as Ida says," said Mr. Miller, patting the little girl's curly head.

"I'm sure the sea-side air is not doing Ida any good," said Mrs. Falconer. "She looks paler and thinner than she did when her papa went away."

"How is it, Puss?" asked Uncle Ralph. "Shall it be go, or stay?"

"I don't know," said Ida, fixing her great black eyes gravely on space. "What do *you* say, Gratia?"

"I should like to return to New York, for my part," said Gratia, quietly.

"Then we will go back on Monday—that will be the middle of September," said Mr. Miller.

So, to Mrs. Falconer's intense disgust, Gratia became the arbitress in this question, as in so many others.

"But we can easily teach her to find and keep her proper place when once we are in our own home," said Alberta, consolingly.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## UNCLE RALPH INTERFERES.

Mr. Ralph Miller's city residence on Fifth avenue, which Miss Falconer called by a species of poetical license "our own home," was a superb brown-stone mansion in the center of one of the most imposing blocks on the avenue—a place splendid beyond Gratia's most exalted anticipations.

For Mr. Miller was rich, and wealth, as we all know, can command everything—but happiness. But Uncle Ralph was happy, too, in his odd, cynical sort of way. He tolerated Mrs. Falconer simply because she was his sister; he despised Alberta's schemes and maneuverings, which were entirely transparent to him, and he disliked Robert's indolence and dissipated habits with equal heartiness. He was fond of Colonel Falconer, who, at he was wont to say, "was the only one of the tribe worth a copper;" and little Ida was the darling of his heart.

To Gratia this new life was fascinating beyond description—the drives among the autumn glories of the Central Park, the morning saunterings among the dazzling bazaars on Broadway, and afternoon lingerings among picture-galleries and artists' studios, the rounds of visits, in which Ida and Uncle Ralph both insisted on Gratia being included.

In the meantime, she did not neglect her opportunities. She read a certain number of hours every day, for she was resolved to cultivate, as much as possible, the treasures of her brain and her intellect. She practiced diligently, under the instruction of Ida's music teacher, and devoted herself enthusiastically to the study of the French and German languages.

"Very sensible, I am sure," said Alberta, shrugging her



shoulders, as she noted Gratia's diligence. "I suppose you are preparing yourself for a governess."

Gratia smiled. She was learning not easily to be annoyed.

"There is no harm in being prepared for any situation in this world," she said, quietly.

"It's no such thing!" cried Ida, indignantly. "She's not going to be a governess. She's to stay and be *my* Gratia."

And even Alberta could not find it in her heart to check the child.

In spite of Long Branch and sea-bathing, in spite of constant watching and the benefit of the best medical advice that New York could afford, Ida's health was visibly failing. There was no positive ailment, but her mother had fallen a victim to consumption, and it was but too evident that the beautiful child had inherited the seeds of the fell disease. There was nothing to warrant recalling her father from Europe, yet every one felt as if little Ida was but a sojourner in their midst for a time—no one could say how brief.

But in proportion to Ida's devotion, the antipathy of Mrs. Falconer and Alberta seemed to increase, and Mrs. Falconer determined, as she expressed it, that "Gratia shall queen it over us no longer. I shall speak to my brother."

"Do, mamma," urged Alberta; "and let it be at once. New Year's Day comes very soon; and, tolerant though we all are of my uncle's wishes, I do not think I can bring myself to receive my friends, with that simpering girl beside me."

That very evening Mrs. Falconer sought her brother in his library, after dinner, a time when she well knew he would most likely be at leisure.

Mr. Miller was sitting in an easy-chair, his legs comfortably stretched out before the fire, and his slippered feet crossed, while a newspaper lay in his lap. He was not reading, however, as his sister entered the room—only meditating.

"I am glad you are alone, Ralph," said his sister; "I wanted to have a conversation with you."



"Ah!" said the old gentleman, elevating his shaggy eyebrows. "Sit down, Julia. Now, what is it about? Ida is no worse, I hope?"

"Ida is as well as usual," said Mrs. Falconer, clearing her throat, and finding it difficult to begin. "But I wanted to speak to you about—about Gratia Kempfield."

"I thought Hugo had decided that for the future she was to be called Gratia Falconer?" said Mr. Miller, quietly.

"Hugo acted like a fool, as he always does when he allows himself to be carried away by his feelings," said his mother, tartly. "I do not think the whole family should be inconvenienced and placed in a false position by his caprice."

"Well?"

"And I have concluded to appeal to your better sense and maturer consideration, Ralph," smoothly went on Mrs. Falconer. "I am sure you must see at a glance how much wiser it would be to put the girl in her proper place. She is too independent and conceited for anything. Alberta and I have borne it as long as we possibly could—in fact, until forbearance has ceased to be a virtue—and we are resolved to ask you to release us from the uncomfortable position we are now compelled to occupy."

"Hear! hear!" cried Uncle Ralph. "Upon my word, Julia, you would have made a capital public speaker."

"Am I not right?" said Mrs. Falconer, somewhat annoyed.

"I don't say you are not; go on."

"I would not counsel you to turn her adrift on the world," said Mrs. Falconer, with an air of mild toleration. "That would scarcely be right, though she has deserved even severer treatment than this."

"I don't think I quite understand what her crime has been," interposed Mr. Miller.

"We are not speaking of crimes," said Mrs. Falconer, sharply. "I only say that a mistake has been made in lifting Gratia out of her proper position into one which is so much



higher as to turn her silly head ; and my advice is to restore her to her natural sphere. I would counsel that she be taught dressmaking, millinery, photograph-coloring, or some other good trade. She might even become a tolerable nursery governess, with a little training."

"I don't doubt it," said Uncle Ralph. "Or a companion to some respectable elderly lady."

"To be sure. I knew you would see it in this light," said Mrs. Falconer, much relieved. "You see, I lack the proper authority to act in opposition to Hugo's wishes ; but as the house is yours——"

"Certainly—of course," said Uncle Ralph, laying down the paper-cutter. "You wish me to interfere."

"That is exactly it."

"Very well," said Mr. Miller. "I will speak to Gratia."

"Thank you, brother," said Mrs. Falconer, trying to conceal her elation by a studied softness of manner. "And perhaps you had better act as promptly as possible, for——"

"Yes, yes," said Uncle Ralph. "I see. No time shall be lost."

Mrs. Falconer's rich silk dress had scarcely rustled away down stairs, before another step sounded on the threshold—that of Bob Falconer.

"I won't keep you long," began Bob, nervously. "The fact is, uncle, I—I only want to ask you if you could accommodate me with a little loan, just for a day or two."

"Another little loan?" echoed his uncle, with a meaning accent on the first word.

"You see, Uncle Ralph, there are so many expenses coming on a young fellow about town," he pleaded, "and when a man has no settled income, and is in no business——"

"And whose fault is it that you are in no business?" said Uncle Ralph, rather shortly. "I am sure I have tried often enough to induce you to give up this miserable, indolent life



of yours, and go honestly to work, as God intended every man should do. And as for lending you more money—or giving it to you, for that is about what it amounts to—I shall do nothing of the sort. If you want money, do as I do, and as your brother Hugo does—work for it. I shall settle no more bills of your contraction !”

“But, uncle,” stammered Mr. Robert Falconer, “you wouldn’t see a fellow locked up?”

“Better locked up than at large, if this is the way you mean to conduct yourself,” said Uncle Ralph, testily.

Robert pulled angrily at his mustache, and his eyes sparkled sullenly under their long, fair lashes.

“But,” he began.

Mr. Miller interrupted him.

“Will you have the goodness to leave the room?” he said, imperiously. “I would like to be alone for a little while.”

Robert rose and skulked, rather than walked, out of the room. On the threshold he passed a young man.

“Mr. Miller?” said the new-comer, interrogatively.

“Yes—come in !” said Uncle Ralph, beginning to be a little out of patience.

“It’s a bill, sir, from Scheik & Maurice’s,” said the clerk, naming a fashionable millinery patronized by Mrs. Falconer and her daughter. “Madame Maurice, sir, she ain’t seen a red cent o’ money these eight months—and four hundred and seventy-five dollars owing, sir, and Miss Alberta promising and promising, as soon as ever she could get the money from her uncle. So Madame Maurice, sir, she says better go to headquarters at once, so here I be, sir, hoping no offense.”

“Let me see your bill,” said Mr. Miller.

He glanced at the items—it was the very bill, a copy of which Alberta had shown him six weeks ago, with a piteous entreaty for money. He had given her five hundred dollars, expressing at the same time his disapproval of allowing accounts to stand so long unsettled, and she had solemnly promised that



it should not again occur. His brow clouded darkly at this evidence of his niece's duplicity.

"I will call at Scheik & Maurice's to-morrow," he said.

The clerk bowed and withdrew.

"A nice set of harpies are these who would fain prey upon me!" said he, walking irritably up and down the room. "Deceit, double-dealing, and a rapacity which grows in proportion to what it feeds on. Were I a poor man, they would not so much as give me the crumbs that fell from their table, and yet they imagine I am fool enough not to penetrate their shallow hypocrisy. But I believe I shall manage to outwit them all yet. It is only making up my mind to a decisive step a little sooner than I should otherwise have done. I was resolved before, now the resolution is sealed."

He rang the bell shortly. Scipio came to the door.

"Ask Miss Gratia if she will be so kind as to come to me a few minutes in the library."

Scipio walked gravely away. Mr. Miller stood gazing into the fire.

"It may as well be now as ever," he said to himself. "I wonder what she will say."

Mrs. Falconer's heart beat high with gratification as from the room beyond she heard the message given by Scipio to the young girl who was, metaphorically speaking, the thorn in her side.

"Really," she whispered to Alberta. "I didn't expect such good luck. He told me he would speak to her, but I never thought he would act so promptly on my advice. But Ralph has a deal of solid, practical good sense, if only he chooses to use it."

"You sent for me, sir?" said Gratia, as she came into the library.

"I did send for you, Gratia, said Mr. Miller, moving forward a chair, which Gratia declined by a negative motion of her head. "I am going to astonish you very much."



"I am not easily astonished, sir," said Gratia, smiling faintly ; "and I believe I can anticipate what you are going to say to me."

"Ah?"

"I have heard one or two things spoken by Mrs. and Miss Falconer ; and Ida has told me others, which lead me to expect a dismissal from this house," said Gratia, speaking firmly and quickly, although in a low voice.

"And what should you think of such a proceeding on my part?" asked Mr. Miller, with an odd sort of smile hovering about his lips.

"I should accept it, sir, without remonstrance, dearly as I love Ida and happy as I have been in the position of Colonel Falconer's adopted daughter. You have been kind to me beyond all I had any right to expect—you have extended to me a home when I was almost homeless—and I shall always be deeply grateful to you for those things, whatever course you may think proper to adopt for the future."

"Well said, my dear," said Uncle Ralph, "and I admire your spirit and temper. But, Gratia, you have misinterpreted my motive in sending for you to-night."

She looked up, her soft eyes filled with questioning surprise. Uncle Ralph went on :

"I am not going to turn you out of doors, my little Gratia," he said, taking her white, warm hand in his ; "I am going to ask you to become my wife !"

---

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE DAWN OF FORTUNE.

For an instant Gratia stood pale and trembling, scarcely able to comprehend the full import of the words that had been spoken to her ; the next minute the rich, rosy blood flew



back to her cheeks, and a bright, exultant fire flashed into her eyes.

"Mr. Miller, you are not trifling with me," she pleaded. "Remember, I am a homeless, motherless girl, and my position alone should exempt me from such cruel jokes."

He drew her gently toward him.

"I am not trifling at all, Gratia," he said. "Am I in any way set apart from the rest of mankind that I should not marry, like them? I have lived a bachelor to the age of fifty-six years; if in the fifty-seventh I chance to change my mind, is it any man's business save mine? I have elected you to be my wife, my dear little girl; all that is lacking is your consent. Yes or no, Gratia? I am a business man, you see," he added, smiling to conceal his own nervousness, "and accustomed to straightforward transactions. To be sure, I am many years older than you, but I have money and a home to offer you as an equivalent for your youth and loveliness. The world will not call it an unequal bargain. I have learned to love and respect you, in all these weeks of your trial and endurance, and if you consent to give yourself to me, I will strive that you shall not regret it. Gratia, will you marry me?"

Had he asked her, "Gratia, do you *love* me?" she could not have answered him satisfactorily. But as it was, she spoke the word "Yes," and placed her hand trustingly in his.

"My darling," he whispered, lowering his voice to a tone of deep tenderness she never before had heard in its accent, "it shall be the study of my life to make you happy. The 'old man's darling' shall never repent the choice she has made. Now come with me."

"Where?"

"To tell those who are so interested in your welfare," he said, smiling roguishly. "Our engagement must be a short one, Gratia. I am not a young man, with years to throw away, and the sooner matters are adjusted on their proper footing, the better."



And he drew her arm resolutely through his, and led her down stairs to the drawing-room before she could remonstrate.

The suite of apartments was lighted and thrown open for evening callers. Mrs. Falconer sat in a low *fauteuil*, with a book of prints in her lap, which Ida was eagerly examining. Robert stood by the carved marble mantel, sullenly looking over the evening paper, and Alberta was reading a novel. All four glanced up in some surprise as Mr. Miller entered the apartment, with his lovely young companion leaning on his arm.

"Julia," he said, turning to his sister, "you requested me to speak to Gratia, and I have done so. Her answer has been quite satisfactory. Let me have the pleasure of introducing to you my promised wife, and the future mistress of this mansion."

There was an instant's dead silence in the room, and then Mrs. Falconer started up, exclaiming huskily :

"It can't be! It isn't possible! Gratia Kempfield *your* promised wife—the bold, presuming——"

"Stop!" roared Uncle Ralph, in a voice of thunder. "Another word like that, Julia Falconer, and I will never look upon your face again. Remember, you are speaking of the girl who is nearest and dearest to me in all the world."

"Oh, Gratia, I am so glad," cried Ida, hurrying to her adopted sister and nestling in her arms. "Uncle Ralph, she is the sweetest girl that ever breathed. Papa will be so pleased!"

Alberta had been silent, while the varying color in her cheek, and the quick panting way in which she drew her breath, evinced the inward turbulence of her emotions.

"I congratulate my new aunt," she said, scarcely trying to conceal the irony of her tone. "This is promotion, indeed, for the chambermaid at the Long Branch Hotel!"

Mr. Miller was about to reply indignantly, when Gratia put her hand softly over his lips.



"What she says is quite true," she said, gently; "and it should not anger you any more than it does me. Thank you for your congratulations, Alberta. May I go up stairs now, sir?" to Mr. Miller. "I am so bewildered and taken by surprise, that my head begins to ache a little, and I would prefer to spend the rest of the evening alone."

Ralph Miller led her to the door, and dismissed her with a smile and a gentle word, and when she was gone, he turned to the amazed circle in the drawing-room.

"I have but one word to say to you all," he said, unconsciously pressing the little hand that Ida stole into his. "Mrs. Ralph Miller cannot possibly be more worthy of respect and esteem than was Gratia Kempfield, but she will have this advantage: *I* shall exact it in her behalf. Any one who ventures hereafter to annoy or insult her is no longer a member of my household."

And Uncle Ralph went back to his library. He met Scipio in the hall.

"Just comin' to look for you, massa," said the black man. "Telegram come—man's a-waitin' for answer."

And he placed a sealed envelope in his master's hand.

Mr. Miller's face instinctively fell as he perused its contents—it was a summons to proceed at once to Boston, where affairs intimately connected with his banking business would require his presence for three days at least.

"How provoking!" muttered Mr. Miller to himself. "Why could not these tangles happen when Hugo is at home? Well, after all, it might be worse. Three or four days are not three or four weeks, and just as soon as I return, the preparations for my marriage shall be hurried on at once."

And Gratia Kempfield, sitting up stairs in her room, vainly trying to realize in her own mind the splendor of the tide of good fortune that was rolling toward her, received a note from her affianced husband, solemnly delivered by the hand of Scipio, half an hour later.



"MY DARLING," it ran, "do not be surprised and offended if I tell you that I must leave you for a few days—four, at the farthest. Imperative business calls me to Boston, but I shall count every moment an hour until I can be with my dear little girl-bride again. Christmas Day is a week from to-morrow; the new year must not be a month old before I call you my own in very truth. Turn that over in your mind while I am gone. I shall be on my way to-morrow morning long before you have wakened from the sweet dreams that I pray may haunt your pillow. Romantic talk this, you will say, for an old man, but love makes one young again. And as I will not again ask to see you this evening, after the excitement and agitation you have been through, I take this way of saying good-by.

Yours, devotedly,

R. M."

Gratia let the letter fall into her lap with almost a sensation of relief.

"Four days," she murmured to herself—"four days of reprieve—four days all to myself! It is what I most longed for in all the world. I shall have the opportunity now to go to Raymond and tell him what is in store for him. Perhaps I may even bring him back with me; but no, it were better to wait until my fortunes are assured beyond the reach of any change. But I may divulge to him the bright secret of our coming life."

And Gratia's countenance flushed and grew radiant as she pictured to herself little Raymond's joy in again seeing her.

"I am selling myself for a price," she thought, "but it is a price worth the ransom."

She breakfasted in her own room the next morning. The servants, who had already contrived to possess themselves of the fact that a change was meditated in the household, were doubly obsequious in her service and eager to anticipate her commands.

"Scipio," said Miss Falconer, sharply, as she poured out her second cup of strong coffee, "perhaps you had better step up to Miss Gratia's room and tell her breakfast is nearly half over."

"Miss Gratia breakfasts in her own room dis mornin',



ma'am," said Scipio, importantly. "Jane, she done took up de chocolate and br'iled chicken half an hour ago."

Alberta looked at her mother.

"So she has begun to put on airs already," she said, contemptuously, quite regardless of the presence of Scipio, who stood solemnly behind the elderly lady's chair. "There will be no living in the house with her after another month."

"It cannot be helped," said Mrs. Falconer, dejectedly.

"At all events," said Alberta, rising, "I shall take the liberty to intrude upon her solitude."

She swept out of the room, and hurried up stairs, tapping softly at the panels of Gratia's door.

"Come in," was the response, and she entered.

But when she saw Gratia standing in the middle of the room, dressed in a plain black silk suit, with a waterproof cloak enveloping her whole person, she could not but start back, with all the civilly cutting speeches she had intended to make quite driven out of her head.

"You are going away?" she cried.

"Yes," was the briefly spoken reply.

"Where?"

"To visit a friend," Gratia answered, after a moment's hesitation.

Alberta bit her lip; she felt the implied reserve.

"Does my uncle know of this?"

"Whether he does or not will not affect my purpose," Gratia replied, coldly.

A polite way of telling me that it is none of my business," said Alberta, with a forced laugh. "But I only came up to express my hopes that illness was not the cause of your absence this morning from table."

"I preferred to breakfast in my room," said Gratia, evasively.

"I am going out shopping this morning," went on Alberta.

"Is there anything I can have the pleasure of doing for you?"

"Nothing, I thank you."



"Wouldn't you like the carriage to take you to your—friend's house? I can wait your pleasure."

"You need not inconvenience yourself," said Gratia, composedly. "I will go in a hack, which I have already sent for."

"In that case there is nothing more to be said," retorted Miss Falconer; but there was a light in her eyes which, had Gratia taken the trouble to interpret the sign, might have bidden her beware. "Good-morning."

She courtesied low, and left the apartment, walking slowly until she had reached the end of the carpeted corridor. Then she accelerated her speed, and hastened breathlessly into her mother's room, jerking the bell-rope as she did so.

"Louisette!" she cried; "run and get me a cab—quick! Let it wait at the corner of the street!"

Mrs. Falconer looked up in surprise as her daughter unbuttoned the jet knobs of her scarlet cashmere morning dress and began to change it for a plain black alpaca, which she had only the day before avowed her intention of giving to Louisette.

"Alberta," she exclaimed, what is the matter? Where are you going?"

"To follow my aunt—that is, to—to—wherever she goes—to make what discoveries I can, for Uncle Ralph's future benefit, and my own edification."

And she related to her mother what she had seen and heard in Gratia's room.

"It looks suspicious, to say the least of it, this sudden journey, so soon after engagement, and following directly on Uncle Ralph's absence," she said; "and I mean to be at the bottom of the mystery!"

"Alberta, tell me what you suspect?" cried Mrs. Falconer.

"Mamma, I don't know myself; another lover, perhaps; a husband, for aught I know. Where there is something to conceal, there is generally something to regret. I asked Gratia a question or two about her goings and comings, and she as good



as told me it was none of my business. She will find that I mean to make it such."

"But, Alberta——"

"Don't bother me with questions, mamma," sharply interposed the dutiful daughter. "There she goes now, and I shall follow her."

"But you can tell me how long you will be gone?"

"As long as she is—neither more nor less!"

As Alberta spoke she ran down stairs. And as the hack containing Gratia Kempfield turned the corner of the street, a light cab whirled after it.

Miss Falconer had managed matters most adroitly. Not a moment of time was to be lost; and she had lost none.

---

## CHAPTER XX.

### GRATIA AND HER BROTHER.

The snow lay white and spotless on the fields that winter day, with a red glow shining over it from the setting sun, as Gratia Kempfield once more walked up the old familiar lane.

"What will they say to me?" she asked herself. "How shall I answer them? What will Raymond be doing when I see him first?"

She had often pictured to herself the glad rapture of this meeting, but now that it was so close at hand, her heart stood still with an awe which no words can express.

Old Leo, the farm dog, heard her light footstep on the crusted snow, and came feebly out of his kennel wagging his bushy tail, his menacing bark changed to a tremulous whine of canine greeting. He jumped up on her, and strove to lick her gloved hands.

"Down, old Leo!" she said, softly patting his head. "Poor dog, good dog, you at least know me again—you are glad to welcome me home."



She lifted the latch of the kitchen door. All there was as if she had left it but an hour ago.

"They are gone out somewhere to spend the afternoon," said Gratia to herself. "All the better; they never took Raymond with them. He has gone up to his room for something."

She had just laid her hand on the latch of the stair-way door, when the door directly opposite was opened, and Mrs. Playfair came into the room, carrying a tin saucepan. She started so violently that she had nearly dropped her utensil at the sight of a stranger.

"Mr. Kempfield and his wife are gone to Wingley," she said, recovering herself in some degree. "I expect 'em back every minute."

"Where is Raymond?" asked Gratia, striving to overcome a huskiness in her voice, for there was some indefinable aspect about Mrs. Playfair, her dress and manner, that filled her mind with fear.

"Well, I declare!" said Mrs. Playfair, "if it isn't Gratia!"

"Yes, it is I," said Gratia. "Where is my brother, Mrs. Playfair?"

"Well, there!" again ejaculated Mrs. Playfair. "Hain't you heerd? But I might ha' knowed you hadn't, or you'd ha' been here afore."

"Heard what? Why don't you answer me, Mrs. Playfair?"

Gratia had turned very white; a chill dew oozed out through the pores of her skin, and her knees seemed losing all strength to support her. By way of reply, the good-hearted neighbor opened the door of the room in which her mother had died, and beckoned to Gratia to cross the hall and enter.

A fire blazed on the hearth, and there was the indescribable smell of a sick-room pervading the atmosphere. These two things Gratia noted before her bewildered eyes caught sight of the little pale, pinched face among the pillows and the transparent hands lying on the spread.



Yes, it was little Raymond ; but how changed—how altered ! The yellow curls still shadowed his forehead, but the blue veins showed plainly through the pallid skin ; the blue eyes shone with the fire that is reflected only from another world, and the cheeks were hollow and sunken.

“Raymond !” she cried, in a gasping, choked voice, “oh, Raymond !”

And then she fell sobbing on her knees beside the bed. It was too much.

“I knew you would come, sister,” said the child, putting his thin arms round her neck.

Child and woman seemed for the moment to have changed places. She was excited, wild, agonized with the impending defeat of all her fondest plans—that downfall of the castle in the air she had built with such fond yearnings, such a limitless depth of love ! But little Raymond stood too near the shores of the other world to feel the shocks and thrillings of this. All these things were past for him.

“Did they tell you I was going to die, Gratia ?” said the little fellow, wistfully stroking the cheeks down which the scalding tears were running. “Don’t cry, sister. I am going to be with my mamma. I prayed God to let me live until Christmas, because I knew you would come back to me then.”

Gratia lifted her wet, wild eyes to his face.

“Raymond ! Raymond ! you musn’t die. Oh, darling, I cannot let you die *now* ! I have come to take you home with me—to such a home as we used to talk about, dear, when all should be sunshine and brightness.”

He looked smilingly into her face.

“I would rather go to heaven, sister, because you see, mamma is there waiting for me. And you will come too, by and by. Let me lie down now, for I am tired—but don’t you let go of my hand, Gratia !”

The poor girl’s pleading eyes sought the face of the kind



nurse who stood beside the bed weeping heartily for company.

"Must this be so?" she syllabled, hoarsely, and Mrs. Playfair nodded her head and cried harder than ever.

"It's her fault, every bit of it," whispered Mrs. Playfair. "She's done it, with her pickings and her naggings, and her cruel treatment, and if Ira Kempfield hadn't been blinder than a mole, he'd a seen how it all was going to end! I never was so mistook about a human creatur in all my life as I was about that Almira Bassett! And now she's took your father off to Wingley this afternoon to buy her a new winter cloak. I told him he'd better stay to hum with the boy that mightn't be spared to him for long, but she came serpentine round, with her soft voice and her smooth ways, and coaxed him to believe we was all in a plot to deceive him and alarm him without cause. And he's gone off, and I hope to the Lord he mayn't be sorry for it, that all!"

And Mrs. Playfair left off crying and talking to untie the bonnet strings that seemed to oppress Gratia's breathing, as she stood there, pale and silent, still holding little Raymond's hand.

"Better set down, you won't disturb him," she said parenthetically. "Well, you see the way of it was this. He's been poorly all the fall, with a real sharp attack of croup every now and then. It does seem as if a blind man might ha' foreseen what was coming; but *she* set out there wan't nothin' the matter with him but just idleness and laziness, and somehow she made Ira Kempfield believe black was white and white black—and she wouldn't let him send for a doctor till all the neighbors was up in arms about it. She was all for taking care of him herself, when things got to the worst, but says I to Phebe Ann, 'I knowed Mary Kempfield, that boy's mother, when she first come here to live, fresh as a daisy—yes, and I laid her out, too, and I ain't goin' to see her motherless boy want for what care *I* can give him!' So Ira he couldn't say 'no' when I come and asked him up and down, and Raymond he begged



too. 'Please, father,' say he, 'let Mrs. Playfair come and take care of me; I won't trouble you long.'

"I declare, 'twas enough to melt a heart o' stone, and mine ain't made o' no such materials, whatever Mrs. Almira Kempfield's may be. I tell you, she looked black as a thunder-cloud at me, and had plenty to say about meddlers and that sort of thing, but I wasn't goin' to mind it—not I. I'd a-writ to you if I'd knowed where on earth to direct, for Raymond kept talkin' about you the whole time. But you hadn't left no clew, and he stood out you'd be here before Christmas. I ain't no spiritualist," added the good lady, blowing her nose violently, "but I do believe his dead mother told him things we didn't know. And your father, he wouldn't take no means to hunt you up. 'She's made her bed,' says he, with that Almira at his elbow, 'now let her lay on it.' And he swears he'll never speak to you again."

"I shall not ask him to," said Gratia, quietly. "I shall take Raymond away with me as soon as——"

"Hush, hush, child," said Mrs. Playfair, "and leave the Lord's doin's in His own hands. Raymond 'll never be took away from here till they take him in his coffin, dear little lamb, with his pretty hands folded on his breast. There—he's a-wakin' up!"

"I've been dreaming, Mrs. Playfair," said he, gazing wistfully through the growing dusk. "I dreamed Gratia was back here. It's most Christmas now, ain't it?"

"I am here, darling!"

Gratia stepped forward and folded the little, frail form in her arms.

"Oh, Raymond, Raymond! Why did I ever leave you!"

"I knew you would come," softly reiterated the child. "I wanted you so much when my head ached, to hold me against your shoulder and sing to me, as you used to sing Sunday evenings. Don't you remember, Gratia? There—so!" and



he nestled close within her passionate embrace. "Now sing 'Jesus, lover of my soul' again."

"I cannot, Raymond," she faltered.

"Just once, Gratia. Nobody sings it as you used to do."

"And that's true!" interpolated Mrs. Playfair, in a sort of tremulous *sotto voce*. "He's beset me to sing it, and I've tried, but law! I hain't no more voice than a crow."

"Please, sister!" cooed the child; and after one or two efforts, Gratia's sweet, bird-like voice soared softly through the silence of the room, in the sweet old words that have brought rest and quietness to many a soul grown faint in the weary pilgrimage of the world—

"Jesus, lover of my soul,  
Let me to Thy bosom fly;  
While the angry billows roll—  
While the tempest still is nigh.  
Other refuge have I none,  
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee!  
Leave, oh, leave me not alone——"

And then her voice broke into a sob—a tempest of tears.

"Oh, Father in heaven!" she wailed, "I cannot say 'Thy will be done!' I cannot bow to Thy decree. Raymond! Raymond! I can't give you up!"

Raymond looked up into her tear-wet face with a puzzled look. The end was nearer than any of them thought.

"Sing more, Gratia," he whispered. "Are you crying?" as a big tear plashed down on his little hands. "What for? I am so happy now. I knew you would come, and I didn't forget the old hymn, 'Jesus, lover of my soul.'"

The little voice, raised tearfully, suddenly paused.

"It's growing dark—all dark, Gratia," he murmured; "but I can hear you singing yet:

"Leave, oh! leave me not alone;  
Still support—still support——"



It was no earthly voice the little child listened to so rapturously. For all we children of earth know, it might have been the voices of cherubim and seraphim before the Throne, for as the words quivered on Raymond's lips he died.

"Don't ye cry, dear—don't ye cry!" comforted kind Mrs Playfair, her own tears raining down on the little child whose eyes she was closing. "He's gone to his mother now, and there's no one can be to a child what his mother was, unless it's the good Saviour, and He's got 'em both now."

\* \* \* \* \*

Once more in the star-sprinkled dark Gratia Kempfield left her father's house—ah, how differently from the glad hopes with which she had entered it! The apples of Sodom, for which she had periled so much, had turned to ashes in her grasp—the little star she had worshiped had gone down in the great sea of death. And all that she carried away from the old home, where they had all been so happy together once, was one little flaxen curl pressed close to her aching heart.

As she stood there the sound of jingling sleigh-bells chimed upon her ear. She stood aside to let the vehicle skim by, and as it shot past the sound of her step-mother's hard, heartless laugh rang out.

The jarring resonance roused her to new vigor.

"Not yet!" she said to herself, setting her teeth close together. "It would please *her* too well were I to fail—to break down in the conflict—to die. There is something worth winning in the world—a triumph which shall be the bitterness of gall to *her*!"



## CHAPTER XXI.

## MRS. KEMPFIELD BEARS TESTIMONY.

“*To—be—sure!*” ejaculated Mrs. Kempfield.

She was coarser, and plumper, and more silky-voiced, if that were possible, than ever, as she sat there opposite Miss Falconer, with a pocket-handkerchief in her lap, which she kept out as a sort of tribute to the trouble which had overshadowed their roof that day.

“So I supposed that of course you were the proper persons to apply to,” said Miss Falconer, smoothly, by way of sequel to her previous conversation.

“Dear me!” said Mrs. Kempfield, breathlessly. “What sort of a situation was it, now—governess or companion?”

“A sort of general charge of a gentleman’s family,” answered Alberta, without the slightest hesitation.

“Well, now, I am astonished she should have the insolence to refer to *me*,” ejaculated Mrs. Kempfield, grasping at the handkerchief as viciously as if it were Gratia’s throat, “when she must have been aware that I knew her from A to Z!”

Miss Falconer inclined her head with a flattering deference of manner.

“I assure you, madam,” she said, “I am already convinced that you are an excellent judge of character. I shall rest quite satisfied with your verdict, whatever it may be. Of course I had my own doubts about the young woman——”

“And well you might have had!” said Mrs. Kempfield, impressively. “Her own *father*, ma’am, has discarded her.”

“Indeed!”

“Discarded her!” repeated the step-mother, with a sort of malicious delight in defaming the character of the absent girl, “and for what, do you suppose?”



"I am sure I do not know," said Alberta, evincing great interest.

"You never could guess," said Mrs. Kempfield, emphasizing her words with energetic twists at the handkerchief.

"I dare say I couldn't," sighed Alberta. "This is such a wicked world!"

"It is, indeed," cried Mrs. Kempfield. "What would you say, ma'am, if I told you she was a *thief*! Stole money, actually, from a very worthy man, a peddler, who chanced to be a guest in our house. Twenty dollars!"

"I should not be at all surprised," said Alberta, secretly exultant.

"A mischief-maker—a bold, disobedient, idle, lazy—but here comes her father," said Mrs. Kempfield, suddenly checked in a list of adjectives which threatened to be as long as the moral law. "Ira!"

The rasping venom of her voice was changed to honeyed sweetness, as her husband came heavily into the room.

He stopped and looked at her.

"Here's a lady called to make some inquiries about your daughter Gratia," said his wife."

Not even the softening crucible of affliction through which this man was passing could blunt the sharp edge of his sullen malice against the daughter who had borne such sure although silent evidence against his household rule.

"She's no daughter of mine," he said, almost savagely. "She has gone her own way, and I'll neither make nor mar in the business. I don't want to be uncivil to the lady, but it is a subject I'd rather not talk about."

"You see," said Mrs. Kempfield, nodding her head, as her husband disappeared through the opposite door, "even her own father has nothing to say for her. He can't bear evidence in her favor, so he is wisely silent."

"Well," said Alberta Falconer, rising, "I am exceedingly obliged, Mrs. Kempfield, for your frankness and courtesy."



The rickety little one-horse sleigh from the hotel at Wingley was waiting at the door for Alberta.

"Any way I've put a spoke in *her* wheel," thought the step-mother as she turned into the house.

And very much the same thought passed through Miss Falconer's mind, though after a more elegant fashion.

"She defied me!" Alberta said to herself, with the flush of triumph burning on her cheek. "I think I can prove to her now that I was not so unworthy an antagonist after all."

And the evening train, steaming into the New York depot, brought both Alberta and Gratia back, after scarcely ten hours' absence.

Gratia kept her own room all the next day, and it was not until the evening of the third day that she joined the family circle. Ida welcomed her rapturously.

"Dear Gratia," she cried, "it has seemed so long since I saw you. But how pale you are!"

Alberta raised her searching black eyes to the pallid face of the other girl, and a curious smile came to her lips.

"I think our darling Gratia has reason to be pale," she said.

"What do you mean?" asked Ida.

"The contemplation of such an important step in life, as she purposes taking, is of course something quite fearful," said Alberta, lightly. "Seriously, though, Gratia, you will have to give up your high moral ideas, and take to a little harmless rouge, like the rest of us."

"I have no desire to heighten my charms," said Gratia, coldly.

Ida stole her arm softly round her adopted sister's waist.

"Don't talk to Aunt Alberta any more," she whispered. "I want you now. Look at all these beautiful new prints that have come for Uncle Ralph while he was gone."

Gratia turned them listlessly over, her eyes scanning their



outlines with a careless glance which scarcely saw anything more than blank paper.

"Gratia," cried the child, throwing down the portfolio of prints, "you are not a bit like yourself. What makes you look so grave? Is it because Uncle Ralph is gone?"

"Don't ask questions, child," said Alberta, with a laugh that jarred harshly on Gratia's excited nerves. "Of course that is the reason. Lovers, my dear, are privileged persons in their moods."

Gratia soon after went up stairs for the night, and Alberta rang the bell for Ida's maid, and the little girl was taken up stairs, much marveling in her mind as to "what made Gratia so strange!"

"Mamma," Alberta said, "I am by no means certain that there may not be a slip between Gratia Kempfield's charming red lip and the cup of good fortune that is so nearly lifted to it. I shall do *my* best to open Uncle Ralph's eyes."

"It will be of no use," said Mrs. Falconer, dejectedly. "Ralph is in love—and an old man's love is ten times deeper and less capable of change than that of a young one. You had better trim your sails to suit the wind, Alberta."

"Not if I can help it," said Alberta, biting her lip. "I shall try, at all events, to break the charm—and if I don't succeed, why then I must take the consequences."

---

## CHAPTER XXII.

### UNCLE RALPH MAKES HIS WILL.

It was not until late in the afternoon of the next day that Mr. Ralph Miller returned from Boston—an event looked forward to with very different emotions by Alberta and Gratia respectively. The former was only anxious to reveal to her uncle all the facts she had learned respecting the antecedents of his



young wife-elect ; the latter felt that matters had changed altogether since the day she promised to be his wife.

Gratia was sitting in the drawing-room, arranging some flowers in a little moss basket for Ida, when the carriage containing her elderly lover drove up to the door. At the sound of his voice at the hall, a sudden tide of scarlet rushed to her cheeks, and she dropped a spray of wax-white tuberose on the carpet.

"Oh, the beautiful flowers !" cried Ida, stooping to recover them ; and when she placed them in Gratia's hand, she was calm and collected once more.

"How awkward I am !" she said, with a faint smile.

"I am sure you have an excellent excuse," said Alberta, with a sweet, shallow laugh, intended to be the very quintessence of archness. "However, if *you* will not go down to meet Uncle Ralph, I will do my best to make amends for your omission."

And she tripped down stairs, and welcomed him with ostentatious affection.

"How is Gratia ?" was his first question.

"She is quite well, dear uncle, considering the journey she has taken during your absence," Alberta answered.

"A journey ? Gratia ?"

"Yes. Oh, uncle, I have so much to tell you about Gratia."

"Let it be after I have rested a little, and had a cup of coffee," said Mr. Miller, somewhat peremptorily. "I have traveled nine hours without stopping. Scipio, see that my things are sent at once to my room."

Alberta Felconer felt herself baffled for the nonce, but she was determined not to be repulsed.

"I will have an audience with my uncle yet before he sees her," she inwardly resolved.

And she waited patiently, curled upon the sofa with a book, directly under the gas-light that burned on the left hand side



of the hall as you approached Mr. Miller's room from the carpeted stair-way, until he came out "freshened up" by a bath and a cup of strong coffee. Alberta sprang up to meet him.

"Dear uncle, I have been waiting so patiently to see you."

His brows contracted slightly.

"Is it a matter of vital importance, my dear? I was just going down stairs."

"But you must hear me first, uncle; you must, indeed!" cried Alberta, breathlessly.

"Speak on, Alberta," he said, leaning against the wall with folded arms, and quietly observant eyes.

"Are you through?" he asked, at last, when she paused, her budget of news thoroughly unfolded.

"Yes, uncle."

"Then, Alberta, listen to *me*. Let this be the last time you dare to breathe an evil word or thought of the girl who is to be my wife. I trust her as I would one of God's angels—and I believe what you have told me to be as false as falsehood itself. Nor do I think any higher of you for this scheming attempt to prejudice her in my eyes—an attempt as futile as it has been ill considered."

And leaving Alberta in a perfect frenzy of mortification, anger, and astonishment, he walked composedly down stairs and took Gratia into his arms as if she had been a pet child like Ida.

"I am going directly down to my office, darling," he said, "where I have an appointment with my lawyer. I shall make my will in your favor this afternoon. 'Delays are dangerous,' says the old proverb, and I am too old to risk any possibilities which can be avoided by a little precaution."

Gratia's eyes, lifted slowly and languidly to his face, were arrested half way by the white, hot anger of a face she saw flitting past the door-way—the face of Alberta Falconer—and she was certain, in her inmost heart, that Alberta had heard



her uncle's words. Yes, there would be a passing sweet cup of triumph in being able to exalt over Alberta and her mother—Gratia was too human not to feel the full force of this—yet not even to drain this cup could she become this old man's wife. Yet, as she looked into his beaming face, serenely benignant in its fixed lines, and invested with a sort of stately dignity by the silver threaded locks that rested on his temples, a new problem rose up before her mind.

Would it be right to sacrifice his happiness to a mere whim on her own part? What mattered it, one way or the other, whom she married, or did not marry? The charm and glory of her own life were gone, but that did not prevent her striving to make another existence happier than it might otherwise be.

All this time she spoke not a word ; but Mr. Miller noticed the changing flush and pallor of her cheeks.

"I have startled you, my love," he said, gently. "I am almost too old and clumsy to be a wooer, but you must teach me better. Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"Oh, no, sir ; I am better now—only—I had something to tell you."

"And I have a great deal to say to you," he interrupted ; "but I must not stay now. I will see you again in the evening, and then we will perfect all our arrangements."

As Mrs. Falconer stood alone in the drawing-room after the others had quitted it, Alberta came in, her cheeks blazing scarlet, her eyes glittering with angry light.

"Mamma," she said, wreathing her fingers restlessly in one another, and biting her lip until the blood started, "it is of no use. She has conquered."

And she related to Mrs. Falconer what she had heard relative to Mr. Miller's new will.

"There is no fool like an old fool !" ejaculated Mrs. Falconer, angrily. "But I did think Ralph Miller had outgrown the age when a man needs must fall in love with a girl simply



because she has youth and prettiness. Well, we have said, and done, and dared all that is possible. All that remains to us is simply to value the goods the gods give us."

While Mrs. Falconer and her daughter were thus discussing the affairs of the future, Gratia was in her room wrestling with her own heart, as Jacob wrestled with the angel of old.

Ida, wearied with a more than usually exciting day, had fallen asleep on a low *tele-a-tete* at the other end of the room.

A shuddering sob broke from her lips as she began noiselessly pacing up and down the apartment.

"What shall I do?" she murmured; "whither shall I turn? Oh! if I were but safe in heaven with you, dear little Raymond! I know now that I never can marry that old man, yet how shall I ever muster courage to tell him so. I would rather go out again and toil for my wretched pittance of daily bread, than to perjure myself before the altar by becoming the wife of a man whom I cannot love."

Dinner was rather a silent meal this evening. Nobody ate much, and very little conversation was kept up at the table. Before the dessert was removed, Scipio came to his master, and announced:

"Mr. Parley, sah, waitin' to see yer in de lib'ry," in a low voice.

"Directly, directly, tell him, Scipio," said Uncle Ralph.

Alberta looked meaningly at her mother. Mr. Parley, as both of them well knew, was Mr. Miller's family lawyer, and his unlooked-for appearance was an evidence that the latter's determination respecting his will had been duly carried into effect.

Whatever the business was, it detained Uncle Ralph a close prisoner in his library until past nine o'clock; then Mr. Parley having been honorably escorted to the door, Mr. Miller entered the drawing-room, and came straight to Gratia.

"My love," he said, stooping over her with reverential tenderness, "I think you told me you had something to say to



me. I am now quite at liberty to hear it ; and it is more Mr. Parley's fault than mine that I have not been released before."

Gratia's heart sank within her as she followed Mr. Miller into the library. He wheeled forward a chair, and beckoned to Gratia to seat herself. Mechanically she obeyed.

"Well, my darling," he said, after a pause of a moment or two, "what is it that you wanted to tell me?"

"That I cannot become your wife, Mr. Miller."

"Gratia !"

"I am quite in earnest, sir !"

The fetters of her tongue were unloosed at last ; the invisible bondage that had seemed to weigh her down had melted away. She rose to her feet, and confronted him with the quiet dignity of one who knew her own mind, and was resolved to speak it.

"But, Gratia, you accepted me before !"

"I know it, sir ; but since that time I have better comprehended my own heart. I was bewildered then, and taken by storm ; I scarcely knew the solemn import of what I was saying. Since then the scales have fallen from my eyes, and I see, fully, that I should be wronging both you and myself, were I to marry you."

A look of exquisite pain swept across his features.

"Dear Gratia," he said, gently, "you will yet see good reason to change your mind in my favor. I shall not take you at your word until you have had an opportunity of reconsidering the whole question. I know that in the world's eye our marriage will seem unsuitable, but are we to abide by the world's decision or our own ? I know that I am no longer a young man, but my heart is fresh, still, Gratia. Do not dash down my hopes so inexorably. Take at least another night to think of it."

She shook her head.

"It would be quite useless, Mr. Miller, believe me."

"Gratia, will you answer me one question?"

"As many as you choose to ask," she answered, frankly.



"Has the journey you took during my absence in Boston anything to do with this sudden resolution?"

She felt the rush of white pallor following scarlet blood suffusing her face as he looked steadily at her, and answered desperately:

"Yes, sir, it has."

"Then," he said, "Alberta was right, after all, and you have been using my love and trust only as a cloak to conceal your devotion to some other lover."

"It is false!" said Gratia, energetically. "No man was ever encouraged to speak to me of love save yourself."

"I believe you, Gratia," he said, relenting. "I think no one could tell a falsehood with so good and pure a face as yours. But you have not yet given me a satisfactory reason for so abruptly rejecting my addresses."

"Because I do not love you, sir, as a wife should love her husband."

"All that will come in time, my darling," he said, reassuringly. "Only trust yourself implicitly to me."

"I dare not risk it," she murmured.

He took her hand, and gently compelled her to reseal herself.

"I have too much at stake to allow you to leave me so, Gratia," he said. "Now, let us discuss this matter calmly and dispassionately."

While this singular interview, so freighted with vital importance to both actors, was transpiring in the library, a more stormy session still was being held in the central drawing-room below stairs.

Robert Falconer had not dined with them, but as his habits were not specially regular, that fact had elicited no particular notice. At about ten o'clock he let himself in at the front door with a latch-key, and came slowly and heavily into his mother's presence.

Mrs. Falconer looked keenly into his face.



"Robert," she said, despairingly, "you have been drinking again."

"Suppose I have," he retorted, impatiently; "it is no worse than all the other fellows do."

"But it *is* worse," said Mrs Falconer, "because you know very well that what few of the 'fellows,' as you call them, would feel at all, sets your brain on fire. Robert, you promised me——"

"There, mother, there!" he interposed, with a sort of insolent fretfulness; "don't let's have any more lecturing I'm not in the humor to stand it to-night. I can't go along in this way any longer. I must have money."

"The old story again, Bob."

"The old story, and the new one," said he, recklessly. "To tell you the truth, mother, I never have been quite frank with you before. I've been trying my hand at casino, and I've had the Evil One's own luck——"

"Which you deserved, for not keeping clear of those gambling hells after I had paid your debts once," almost screamed Mrs. Falconer, whose work had dropped from her hand.

"But," went on Robert, apparently without hearing her interpolation, "I've had plenty of chances. They all knew I had a rich uncle, who couldn't help cutting up fat some day, and every one was willing enough to lend to me. Then I lost heavily on the fall races at Fleetwood and Jerome Park, and Johnson told me there was such a good opportunity for me to make a few thousands on Nebraska bonds. So I raised a lot of money again, and my infernal luck swamped me and Johnson both. The bonds ran down before we'd had 'em two days, and licked up our margin like wild-fire. And then there came about this story of the old governor going to take a young wife——"

"How?" breathlessly interrupted his mother.

"How should I know? How do such things always get about?"



“Probably you told it yourself in one of your drinking fits,” said Mrs. Falconer, bitterly. “No one in the house has mentioned it.”

“It don’t matter how, but there’s the fact,” said Robert, savagely frowning. “And of course that let loose all the creditors on me, like a pack of wolves.”

“Put them off, again, some way,” suggested Mrs. Falconer.

“Easily said, but it can’t be done.”

“I don’t know what else you can do,” said his mother, with the weariness of utter despair. “I have already anticipated Hugo’s allowance, and——”

“Mother,” the young man said, lowering his voice, “it *must* come out some day or other, if you don’t help me to hide it. I was half mad for five hundred dollars, and I signed Hugo’s name to one of my checks. I knew he had plenty of money in the bank, and we are both Falcons.”

“Robert !”

“After all, where’s the harm ? It’s only borrowing of him for a little while. Hugo has always had the devil’s luck in his business affairs, and I have never had any show at all. I meant to replace the money in bank before any row could be made about it, but you see how it is. Everything I’ve touched has been a failure.”

Mrs. Falconer wrung her hands despairingly.

“Oh, Robert, Robert ! You are talking of *forgery* !”

“Hold your tongue !” exclaimed Robert Falconer, angrily. “I must have money—that’s the long and the short of it. My uncle must give it to me if you can’t, or else see the old Falconer name dragged through the mud and mire of the police courts.”

“Your uncle—your uncle !” almost screamed poor Mrs. Falconer. “If it had not been for this foolish infatuation of his, your creditors could never have come upon you all at once. Oh, Robert, I would rather see him in his grave than married to that girl !”



As she uttered the words, Alberta hurried into the room on tiptoe, her finger raised and her eyes sparkling.

"Mamma," she cried, in a rapturous whisper, "I have good news for you. Uncle Ralph and Gratia are quarreling. I heard voices as I came by, and I—I listened at the door. I heard him plainly say, 'You have no right to treat me so !' and she is on her knees to him. Oh, mamma, we shall yet be safe !"

Mrs. Falconer's heavy eyes caught something of the exultant glitter which lighted up those of her daughter.

"Are you sure, Alberta?"

"Don't I tell you I heard it with my own ears and saw it with my own eyes?"

"Then there is hope for us. Hush ! is that the clock striking ten?"

"Eleven," said Alberta, breathlessly. "And she is in the library still. I know it is something connected with that journey that has made mischief between them."

"At any rate," said Robert, rising sullenly, "I shall go to bed. Things cannot be any worse with me than they are now ; and they may be better, that's one consolation."

"Mamma." said Alberta, apprehensively, "what has Bob been doing now? I see new trouble in your face."

"Nothing—nothing; don't ask me now," said Mrs. Falconer, dejectedly. "Come, Alberta, let us go up stairs."

---

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WHO MURDERED HIM?

Mr. Ralph Miller, albeit he was contemplating a change in his condition in life, had a good deal of the old bachelor leaven about him, and one of his pet whims was that no one but Scipio, the colored butler, must ever arrange either his own room or the library.



"Scip knows my ways," Uncle Ralph was wont to say. "He understands just where I keep everything, and how I want things handled. I won't have a pack of house-maids peering and peeping about the place."

Early on the morning of this twenty-third day of December, therefore, Scipio came leisurely up stairs, with brooms and dusters under his arm, and in his right hand a scuttleful of coal, surmounted by kindlings.

As he entered the hall he saw a tray of china standing on the third stair of the second flight. He stopped short.

"Dat de second time Marianne's lef' dat ar cheeny 'bout," he said, half aloud. "An' de little painted set missis is so drefful ch'ice about!"

He set down his coal-scuttle long enough to ring the house-maid's bell sharply, and then went on to the library door just beyond, pushing it open with his foot, as he perceived that it was ajar.

The next instant coal, kindlings, brooms, and all went crashing to the floor, as Scipio started back in consternation.

For, stretched on the Turkey carpet at his feet, lay the body of a dead man—Ralph Miller's body!

Quite dead, with his arms thrown out on either side, and his face singularly peaceful, although the half-open eyelids disclosed glassily staring eyes, and the hands were tightly clenched. Scipio noted all these things in the first paroxysm of his terror and alarm.

"Murder! Fire! Help! Robbers!" bawled Scipio, in the unreasoning excess of his consternation. "Ole massa's done gone dead in a fit! Go fo' de doctor, some one. Help me to lif' him up on de sofy. Good Lord!" suddenly dropping the hand he had lifted, "it's as cold as stone!"

It seemed as though scarcely a minute had elapsed before the room, so lately hushed and silent, was full of eager spectators crowding in.



Marianne, the house-maid, hurried in, all unmindful of her delinquencies, and the crash of breaking china on the staircase was the first thing that reminded her of the tray, as Robert Falconer rushed down stairs and into the room.

"My stars!" ejaculated Marianne, "there goes that painted china that Mrs. Falconer's so awful set on."

"Stop!" shouted young Falconer, as the footman was about to help Scipio lift up the prostrate form. "How is this? What has happened? Be careful how you handle him; this may be a paralytic fit."

"No, sah, no," said Scipio, sorrowfully. "He's dead as a door-nail—he is so, Mass' Robert. Jes' feel his poor hand, sah—cold as marble."

Robert drew back with a shudder.

"How did this happen?" he asked, in a low tone.

"All I knows, sah," answered Scipio, "is dat I came in as usual wid de coals for to kindle de fire, and I see him a-lyin' straight on the floor afore me."

"Don't tell my mother suddenly," said Robert, in a husky voice. "It might kill her."

But his caution had come too late. Mrs. Decker, the house-keeper, had rushed shrieking across the hall.

"Oh, get up, ma'am, get up!" screamed Decker, as soon as she could catch her breath, "or we shall all be murdered in our beds!"

Mrs. Falconer started from a fevered slumber into which she had fallen toward daylight.

"Mr. Miller, ma'am!" gasped Decker, in answer to her mistress' look of blank astonishment and dismay, "he's lyin' dead in the library, in a fit, ma'am."

At the same moment Alberta came into the room from a side entrance.

"Mamma, what is it?" she cried. "What does all this screaming and confusion mean?"



Mrs. Falconer had sunk back against her pillows, deathly pale.

"I—I don't know," she said, in accents of terror. "Go and see. And, Decker, send my maid. I am sure there must be some frightful mistake."

Miss Falconer only staid to twist her hair up in a loose coil, and to belt down her dressing-gown, and so it happened that she entered the library directly after the doctor, who had been hastily summoned from his residence on the next block.

"Stand back!" she said, authoritatively, to the crowd of servants. "What is it, Robert, tell me!"

"You had best go back," said Robert, sharply. "He's dead, and you can't bring him back to life. This is no place for you women."

"I am not one of your nervous kind," said Alberta, contemptuously. "Doctor, you, at least, are not half crazed with terror. What is it all about?"

Dr. Hayley had knelt down on the carpet, beside the sofa on which they had laid the corpse of Ralph Miller, and was going through the usual formula of feeling the pulse, which had long ceased to beat, examining the features, and listening for any possible indications of dormant vitality.

Presently he rose and looked down upon the corpse for an instant, with a puzzled face. Then, stooping over, he tore open the satin vest which Mr. Miller habitually wore, and examined the pulseless heart.

"There has been some foul play here," he uttered, in accents of the extremest horror and dismay.

"Foul play!" gasped Alberta, while her brother stood, pale and silent, at the side of the sofa. "Oh, doctor, you are mistaken, surely!"

"I am not mistaken," said Dr. Hayley, in a low tone. "At first I was tempted to imagine that his death proceeded from some natural cause; but the hand of Nature never opened the



gates through which he passed to the other world. This is the corpse of a murdered man !”

Alberta's shrill shriek of terror echoed through the house, but Robert only pressed closer to the doctor's side.

“Tell me what has led you to suspect this thing?” he asked, in an eager, stifled voice.

“Look here.”

Dr. Hayley bent over the corpse and pointed to a tiny spot of deep, sullen red—a pin-prick, as it were—upon the breast.

“Touch that, he said, and you will feel that there is some metallic substance below it—probably a very small slender dagger. This man has been stabbed to the heart !”

But Robert started back.

“It is horrible !” he muttered. “How can you treat it so lightly?”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

“It is a part of my profession,” he said. “I have seen such a case as this once before, in an instance where an Italian woman murdered her husband in a paroxysm of jealousy. She used a long, slender darning needle, and if it hadn't been for a single link of evidence, we never should have suspected but that the man died a natural death. Your uncle has been foully murdered, Mr. Falconer.”

“But by whom?”

“It is your business to ascertain whom,” said Dr. Hayley, with the quiet self-possession with which medical men always seem to regard the grim presence of death. “The police must be notified at once. The coroner must be summoned to attend.”

“Is that necessary?” Mr. Falconer asked, seeming rather to dislike the idea.

“Not pleasant, but necessary,” Dr. Hayley answered. “In the meantime, as I can be of no further use, I may as well return home.”



He was edging his way through the crowd as Alberta approached her brother, and said, in a trembling whisper :

“Robert, do you not suspect who has done this?”

“No.”

He turned a face of indescribable terror toward her.

“You are purposely blind!” she cried, still in the same whisper, which was clear and sibilant. “It was Gratia!”

“Impossible!”

“Not by any means impossible; and you will find I am correct. Don’t you remember their quarrel last night? Don’t you remember—but you were not here in the afternoon,” she cried, recollecting herself, “but the rest of us heard it. He announced his intention of going down to Mr. Parley’s office to make his will in her favor. Mr. Parley was with him in this very room until after nine o’clock. It was after that that they had their long interview; that they quarrelled in my hearing, as I chanced to be passing. Don’t you see, Bob?” she cried, grasping eagerly at his arm. “She must have perceived that her opportunity was slipping away. She knew that his will was made, and she meant that he never should have a chance of altering it. Oh, *I* knew her all along; *I* saw through all her sweet smiles and gentle ways, and foretold it all, though no one would believe me.”

He stood looking at her, as if the force and suddenness of the calamity now descending upon their house had bereft him of the power of immediate comprehension.

“Alberta,” he said, hoarsely, “I never thought of this before. But it may be possible—nay, I cannot deny that it is probable. This matter must be investigated.”

Robert whispered to Scipio a brief order to go at once to the coroner’s office, and to give directions below stairs that not a soul should be admitted, with the exception of the police and the necessary officials.

Gratia was in her room, brushing the long, bright curls, when Ida hastened into the room.



"Gratia," she faltered, "do you know what they are saying down stairs?"

"No," she replied, her lips smiling a soft welcome to the new-comer.

"That Uncle Ralph is dead."

"Dead!"

Gratia started back so suddenly that the ivory-backed hair-brush fell to the floor, while the soft roses in her cheek blanched.

"And that he is murdered, Gratia!"

"It is impossible!" said Gratia, gathering new courage from the sight of the little girl's terror. "Come, let us go down and see for ourselves. I will put on my dress in an instant."

Mrs. Falconer's hysterical screams, and Alberta's voice endeavoring to reassure her, reached their ears as they passed the door of her apartment; but, although they looked with silent dismay into each other's faces, neither spoke. In the hall below they met Scipio.

"Best go back, young ladies," said the old man. "'Tain't no place for de likes ob you here."

"Is it true, Scipio?" cried Ida, breathlessly.

"It's all true, miss, dear," said the old colored man. "He's dead, an' I's done los' de bes' massa ever nigger had. An' dat ain't de worst ob it—he's *murdered*, Miss Ida!"

Ida burst into a cry of horror, but Gratia did not speak for a moment.

"Let us go back, Ida," she said at last, and Ida obeyed her.

---

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### SEEKING FOR A CLEW.

"What is it, Gratia?" Ida asked, with tearful earnestness, early in the afternoon. "What is a coroner's inquest?"

"I don't quite know myself, dear; twelve men, I believe,



who come and make inquiries in case of a sudden and mysterious death, and decide what has been the cause of it."

"But how can *they* tell who killed Uncle Ralph?"

"I can't tell you, Ida; perhaps they cannot. But they will do their best to investigate the mystery."

"Who do you suppose it was, Gratia? Who could be cruel enough to hurt a good man like Uncle Ralph, and one that everybody loved?"

"There are more cruel people in the world, Ida, than you have any idea of," said Gratia, sadly, as she sat on the lower stair of the upper flight, with Ida leaning against her.

At that moment Mrs. Falconer swept by.

"Ida," she said, "what are you sitting here for? Go to your room, child, until all this tumult and confusion are over. As for you, Miss Kempfield, I wonder that you have the audacity to show your face at all, after what has happened."

The tone, more than even the insulting words, stung Gratia keenly. She rose with burning cheeks and quivering lip.

"Why should I not show my face? What do you mean, Mrs. Falconer?"

But Mrs. Falconer only answered by taking Ida's hand and leading her away; and when Gratia would have gone down stairs to the little reception-room off the hall, she was intercepted by Scipio.

"Berry sorry, Miss Gratia, but you can't come down."

"Why not, Scipio?"

"No one is to go down till arter de inquest is ober. Berry sorry, but dem's my orders."

"And I do not wish you to disobey them on my account," said Gratia, quietly turning back again.

And as she went up, she could hear Scipio speaking in a low voice to Marianne, who was dusting the paneled black walnut of the hall wainscoting.

"Dar! I tole you *she* neber was the one to do it! 'Tain't natural she should."



"Just wait and see," retorted Marianne, viciously whisking her duster into an obscure corner. "If she didn't, who did?"

Vaguely wondering what the servants were talking about, Gratia went back to her room.

In the meanwhile the coroner's jury were duly assembled in the library, where the corpse lay lightly covered with a white sheet. The usual forms and ceremonies were gone through with, and Scipio's evidence was then taken. The faithful negro, with tears streaming down his face, told how he had found his master's corpse on first entering the room that morning.

"And you have no idea how it could have happened?" asked one of the jury.

"No, sah, dat I hasn't."

"He was on good terms with all the servants?"

"'Deed was he!" Scipio answered, indignantly. "Dar wasn't one on 'em but would hab gone on dere knees to sarb him, he was dat considerate, was Massa Miller."

"And the family—had there been any violent misunderstanding? You understand—there will be family quarrels, no matter how harmoniously people live?"

"Yes, sah, I comprehends!" Scipio answered, with dignity. "No, sah, der was no quarrel. We doesn't quarrel, sah. Except, maybe," and Scipio rubbed his gray wool perplexedly, "once in a while Mass Bob. Mass Bob, sah, was always wantin' money—young gentlemen does, you know, sah—an' Mr. Miller, he hadn't no patience wid dat."

"Did it ever amount to a serious difficulty?" questioned the juryman.

"Bless your heart, sah, you'd tink dey'd tar each other to pieces—but it neber lasted long. Didn't 'mount to nothing, sah."

"How was it last evening?"



“Mass Bob wasn’t at de dinner table—didn’t see his uncle de whole evenin’.”

“How do you know?”

“He didn’t come in till ten o’clock or arter—I let him in myself, an’ dat’s de way I knows. Mr. Miller was in de library wid Miss Gratia, de young lady he was to marry—and Mass Bob went up to bed afore Miss Gratia lef’ de libr’y.”

“But he might have come down again.”

“No, sah, he didn’t.”

“How do you know? Did you sit up all night to watch?”

“No, sah, but I knows, dis yer ways: Mars Bob he went up while I was settin’ in de hall readin’ de paper, an’ it was mos’ an hour arterward dat Miss Gratia cum out ob de libr’y, an’ ran up stairs as fas’ as eber she could jump. So I set dar awhile longer, waitin’ to hear if ole massa wrung his bell, or wanted anything.”

“Was he in the habit of ringing for you at that hour of the night?”

“Not often, sah. Once in a while. Sometimes he set in de library an’ write half de night, or read, an’ he neber likes de servants to set up for him. Arter I heard de clock strike midnight I went to bed. I put out de hall gas, but de libr’y door stood a little way open, an’ I could see de light shining on de carpet.”

“Could you see into the room?”

“No, sah.”

“Nor hear anything?”

“Not a sound, sah—but Mr. Miller was always quiet like.”

“And that was the last you saw of the library door?”

“Yes, sah, dat was de las’.”

“Then how can you be sure that Mr. Robert Falconer did not come down to his uncle afterward?”

“Dat was what I was coming to!” said Scipio, with an injured air. “Marianne, sah, she’s de second house-maid. She’s a good worker, but she’s mighty forgetful; an’ missis she



likes de little tray o' cheeny brought up to her room ebery night, arter de cups is washed, an' it's Marianne's business. Well, it done happened dat Marianne had a beau las' night an' done forgot de cheeny till arter ten o'clock. Didn't dar to tell me," added Scipio, with dignity, "for I'd reproved her so often for just de same ting, so she waited till I'd gone to bed, an' den crept up stairs in her stockin' feet wid de tray in her hands. But when she came to de libr'y door she see de light shinin' out on de floor, an' she didn't dare to keep on, les' somebody should come out an' catch her. So she done set de tray on de stairs—Mrs. Falconer's dressin'-room door was part open, too, an' dat was jus' beyond—an' Marianne she t'ought she could easily come up early in de mornin' afore any one was stirin', an' put de tray in de dressin'-room, and nobody be none the wiser! An' if Mass' Bob had come down arter dat he mus' hab tumbled ober de tray, an' de half-light—nobody couldn't a-seen it from above—an' roused de whole house, besides breakin' his own neck. An' dat de way I knows he didn't, sah."

"A very ingenious chain of evidence," said the coroner, smiling. "Now let us have Marianne up at once."

Marianne's testimony corroborated that of the old negro in every particular.

"Did you observe that your mistress' dressing-room door was open?" asked one of the jurymen.

"A little way, sir."

"Was the light burning then?"

"Yes, sir; turned down very low, I should judge."

"Was your mistress in the habit of leaving a light all night?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Falconer was nervous nights. I wouldn't have minded *that*, sir, but I was afraid Mr. Miller would open the library door and see me, and he was mortal particular about that fancy china."

"It seems that your carelessness has for once done your



young master a good turn," said Mr. Cleve, the young juryman who spoke oftenest; and the coroner told the flurried housemaid, to her great relief, that "she might go down."

Dr. Hayley's evidence was next in order, according to the coroner's tablets. He testified, plainly enough, that death had been almost instantaneously caused by the slender poniard or dagger which had been found buried in the heart. He instanced one or two similar cases, and was waxing rather scientific, when Mr. Cleve somewhat impatiently interrupted him.

"I believe there is no manner of doubt about *how* the death was caused," he said, "but our business seems now to be to find out *who* caused it."

Scipio spoke a low word or two in the coroner's ear at this moment, rather reluctantly as it seemed.

"Let Miss Falconer be sworn at once," said he. "There is some probability that fresh light will be thrown on the case now, gentlemen."

Miss Falconer was the next to testify, in a pretty, hesitating way that could not but favorably impress the jury.

"Have you formed any idea as to who did the deed, Miss Falconer?" the coroner asked.

"Must I answer that question?" she faltered.

"Certainly. Remember that you are under oath."

"Then," she said, after a moment or two of silence, "I must speak the truth. I believe the murder to have been committed by Gratia Kempfield, the girl to whom my Uncle Ralph was engaged."

"What has led you to this belief?"

"Several circumstances, sir. One is that I chanced to overhear them quarreling violently late last night, as I passed the library door. My uncle, in a voice of the greatest agitation, exclaimed: 'You have no right to treat me so,' or words to that effect, and she was kneeling on the floor before him, apparently supplicating for something."

"What do you suppose it to have been?"



"I believe that he had broken their engagement, and that she was entreating to be again received into favor. Mistaken motives of delicacy induced me to hasten on. I wish now that I had remained to see what next transpired."

"What did you judge from the sound of their voices? Was he angry?"

"Very, I should think, and she was evidently anxious to conciliate him."

"Did he say more?"

"He might have done so. Probably he did, but I did not stay to hear. That was the last word I ever heard him speak," and Alberta's voice faltered.

"You said there were 'circumstances' which led to this belief on your part. What were the others?"

"One was the fact that my uncle had made his will in the girl's favor yesterday."

"How do you know?"

"He told us all so, or gave us to understand as much. His lawyer was with him until nine o'clock. And the hope to inherit the wealth that would have been withheld from her, in the case of a quarrel leading to permanent estrangement, might have led to the murder."

The coroner looked keenly at Alberta.

"You seem to have considered the matter in all its bearings, young lady."

"I have, sir," returned Miss Falconer, composedly. "It is scarcely in nature for one to lose so near and dear a relative as suddenly as I have done, without deeply cogitating on all the possibilities as to how it could have occurred."

"Go on. Tell us all you think on the subject."

"Certainly; but you must remember that I do not state these things as facts, only as my own impressions. Another circumstance has also impressed itself indelibly on my mind—a conversation between Gratia Kempfield and my niece, Ida, a few days ago. They were looking over some French anatomi-



cal prints which had been sent to my uncle, and Gratia asked where was the location of the heart. They found it, and after studying it intently Gratia said, in a strange, sudden way which attracted my attention, something about 'how slight a thrust could put an end to all the world's troubles.' I am not positively certain as to the words, but that was their import."

"When was that?"

"The afternoon before my uncle's return from Boston."

"Well?"

"And I have frequently heard her assert that she would do anything for the sake of money. It has always seemed to me that she was of a remarkably mercenary temperament for one so young."

Mrs. Falconer, Robert, and Ida were all three next examined, each in due succession. Mrs. Falconer's words confirmed those of her daughter. She had always disliked and distrusted Gratia Kempfield, who had become a member of their family entirely through a whim of her elder son, now absent in Belgium, and of whose antecedents or family history they had known absolutely nothing. Mr. Miller, they had known, with regret, to have fallen under the spell of the girl's extreme youth and great beauty, in a mood that amounted to actual infatuation, but they had trusted to the very last that he would find her out. The disenchantment, however, had seemingly come too late.

Robert was more non-committal. Had always liked and admired Gratia Kempfield; saw no objection to his uncle's marrying when he liked, although he should, of course, have preferred for an aunt-in-law some one whose social standing was a little more refined. Never had seen anything about Gratia which induced him to believe that she was of a passionate or revengeful disposition. Could not say what she might or might not have done under the influence of extreme temptation. Knew there was some row in the library the night before, as he passed the half-open door, from the sound of voices, but asked no questions, supposing matters would right themselves.



Ida, crying bitterly, was persuaded by the coroner, and commanded by her grandmother, to repeat the conversation that had transpired over the anatomical plates.

"But I know Gratia never did it," sobbed the child. "I *know* it!"

"Your room is near that of Miss Kempfield?" the coroner asked, kindly.

"It is the next room."

"Did you hear her come up stairs last night?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to her?"

"I called 'Gratia' as she passed my door, and begged her to come in, as she often did at night when I couldn't get to sleep."

"And what answer did she make?"

"She said, 'Not to-night, Ida.'"

"Did her voice sound as if she were under the power of any strong emotion?"

"It sounded as if she had been crying."

"Was she in the habit of being easily moved to tears?"

"I shall not answer you any more!" flashed out Ida. "You want me to say something against Gratia—and I won't, for she's the sweetest, best, dearest——"

And here Ida ran up to her grandmother and buried her sobbing face on the lady's shoulder. Even Mrs. Falconer looked appealingly at the coroner. He nodded, and she rang the bell for Joanna to take her young lady away.

And the first intimation that Gratia Kempfield had of the fearful suspicions which were every instant forming themselves into a darker cloud of testimony against her, was the passionate exclamation of the little girl as she limped into the room, her curls hanging disheveled about her face, and her cheeks aflame.

"They tried to make me say something against you, Gratia, but I wouldn't! I wouldn't! I wouldn't!"

"Against me, Ida?"



The child answered only by her sobs. The scene below stairs, with its array of silent jurymen, its crowd of listeners at the door, and the ghastly presence of the covered corpse in the background, had racked her nervous system to the utmost extent of its endurance.

"Joanna, what does she mean?" Gratia asked, lifting her eyes to the maid, while she smoothed down Ida's hair, and endeavored to quiet her agitation.

"It means, miss—not as I believe a word of it!" cried Joanna, excitedly—"but they're a-tryin' down stairs to prove as it was you murdered the poor, dear gentleman."

"That—it—was—I—murdered—him!" slowly repeated Gratia, almost stupefied by the force and suddenness of the suspicion. "Great Heaven!"

"Miss, you ben't goin' to faint?" screamed Joanna, catching up the caraffe of water, as a deadly ashen hue crept up to the roots of Gratia's hair.

"No," Gratia answered, recovering herself with an effort, and Ida sobbed out the whole story to her.

"It's a shame, miss! a burning shame, so it is!" cried the zealous Joanna. "But it's my belief Miss Alberta'd like to see you hanged!"

"You must not speak so, Joanna," said Gratia, calmly. "It is some hideous mistake—it *must* be. It will be set right after a while; we need not worry ourselves about it."

But Joanna could see that she was trembling violently as she spoke; and almost at the same moment Scipio knocked at the door. The coroner's jury requested the presence of Miss Kempfield down stairs in about fifteen minutes.

"Jes' as soon as dey done get troo wid Mr. Parley," said Scipio, in a low tone. "Dey're a-edzaminin' of Mr. Parley now."

"You're not going, miss!" said Joanna. "No one ain't bound to criminate themselves to please other folks."

"I am not afraid to tell all that I know," said Gratia, with



gentle dignity. "Heaven always protects the innocent, and Heaven itself knows that I am as guiltless of the terrible deed as little Ida herself. Yes, Scipio, I will come."

Mr. Parley's examination elicited the fact that although all the preliminaries had been arranged for the new will in Gratia Kempfield's favor, the paper itself had not been executed, and that consequently the will of ten years since—leaving the property equally to his two nephews and his niece, with a liberal provision for Ida, and a generous legacy to his sister, Julia Eloise Falconer—was still in force.

"But *she* did not know but that the will was duly signed!" cried Alberta, forgetting her own triumph in her anxiety to fix the stain of guilt upon Gratia Kempfield. "*She* supposed his death would leave her sole heiress of everything, if it happened before he could have time to alter his bequest; and she said herself she would do anything for the sake of being rich."

There was a momentary hush throughout the room as Gratia Kempfield entered, looking very lovely with a crimson flush on either cheek, and eyes shining with repressed excitement. The coroner himself, albeit he was a staid old gentleman, nearer seventy than sixty years old, could not but look admiringly on the young beauty, as she stood there graceful and silent, with the dreadful shadow of suspicion and mystery encompassing her around as it were.

"You were engaged to marry Mr. Miller, Miss Kempfield, were you not?" he asked, courteously.

"No, sir."

"You were not?"

"Up to nine o'clock last night, I was—after that time, our engagement was canceled."

"By his wish?"

"No, sir, by my own."

"Are you willing to state your reasons for annulling the marriage compact?"



"No, sir, I am not. The reasons were purely personal to myself, and can have no possible bearing on the present affair."

"Was he willing to release you from the compact?"

"He seemed at first very unwilling; he declared repeatedly that I was wrong in my determination—that I had no right to treat him so; but I finally succeeded in convincing him that I was in the right."

"Did you kneel to him?"

She colored scarlet.

"I did—to implore his forgiveness for the wound I knew I was inflicting upon his noble and kindly nature—to entreat him to forget me and my ill-advised promise to marry him."

"And he?"

"He forgave me, and we parted friends."

"What was he doing when you left him?"

"He stood by the fire, leaning one arm on the mantel."

"Do you remember what time it was?"

"Not precisely, but I suppose it could not have been far from midnight."

"Did you know anything of Mr. Miller's testamentary papers?"

"I supposed he had made his will in my favor. He told me so."

"The will was prepared," said Mr. Parley, slowly, "but not signed."

Gratia inclined her head quietly, as if that were a matter of no sort of interest to her.

"Miss Kempfield," said the coroner, evidently somewhat puzzled by her demeanor, "had you any expectation of inheriting all or a portion of Mr. Miller's wealth after you had heard of his death?"

"I never gave it a thought, sir."

"Yet one of the witnesses here to-day has testified to hear-



ing you say once that you would do anything for the sake of money."

Gratia stood a moment thinking.

"I did say so once. I thought so then, but during the last week all my opinions on that subject have been vitally changed."

"Have you formed no opinion on the question as to who has murdered Ralph Miller?"

"No, none."

"Had he any enemies within your knowledge?"

"No, sir, not one in the world."

"You may go, Miss Kempfield."

And Gratia left the room as quietly as she had entered it.

"I am sure she did it!" cried Alberta, the instant the door was closed. "She is stoical and prepared, and her own mother said she was capable of any evil deed."

"Her *step*-mother," said Robert Falconer.

"It's just the same."

"Indeed it isn't, then," said the young man. "Don't be spiteful, Berta; she never can be your aunt now, nor the heiress of Uncle Ralph's money, and I no more believe she did it than that you did."

"Then who was it that murdered Uncle Ralph?"

"The police must ferret that out."

"But isn't Gratia even to be arrested?" breathlessly questioned Alberta.

"There is no shadow of an excuse for doing so. Miss Falconer, your zeal carries you to extremes," said Mr. Parley, soothingly.

"But I am certain she was the murderess!"

"Morally certain, perhaps, my dear young lady; and I must confess that I share your suspicion on the subject. But it is necessary that we must be legally certain as well, to justify extreme measures."

Fifteen minutes afterward the jury brought in the only verdict that could possibly have been expected: "Death from the



hand of some person or persons unknown," and the melancholy conclave broke up.

"Never knew such a puzzling affair in all my life," said Mr. Cleve to the lawyer, as he passed out.

"Very melancholy," said another.

"Of course that pretty girl must have done it," said a third.

"I've known the temper of a demon hidden under a more attractive exterior than hers. But she struck the blow a little too soon."

"There's an ugly look in the whole thing," said another juryman, for the first time speaking above his breath, as he passed out of the marble-paved vestibule into the open air.

"And if I were Mrs. Falconer, I would get that girl out of the house as soon as possible. Mind, I don't *say* anything," he added, rather apprehensively, and went his way.

And once more the gloom and dreariness of twilight came down upon the room in which Ralph Miller lay dead.

---

## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE BRIDAL PEARLS.

"Scipio !"

The old negro, sitting by the door of his dead master's room, started from the half doze into which he had fallen in the dusk.

"Miss Gratia, is it you?"

"Yes. I want to look at him, Scipio. I have not seen him since last night, and you know he was very, very kind to me."

Scipio rose up with alacrity. He was one of the firmest believers in "Miss Gratia's" spotless innocence.

"Deed was he miss, and so he was to all of us. Ole Scip'll neber get such anoder massa. Come in, Miss Gratia."

He held the door open for her to pass.



A pair of wax candles, in massively frosted silver sticks, burned on the mantel, and the corpse lay peacefully in a rich rosewood coffin.

The tears fell swift and scalding from Gratia's eyes, as she stood looking down at the peaceful, dead face.

"Dear friend," she murmured aloud. "He who has said, 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay!' will surely bring this crime home to the murderer's guilty head. And *your* peace will be everlasting."

And as she spoke she took the corpse's cold hand into hers for an instant, and touched her lips to the pallid forehead. Scipio, standing silently by, looked from his dead master to her, and then back again.

"No one need tell me now dat it was *her* done it," he said to himself. "De blood gushes out from de wounds ob de murdered man when de murderer comes near, and I could e'en a'most fancy poor Mas' Miller smilin' when she come a-nigh de coffin an' looked at him. She's as innocent as de white lilies on de coffin-lid. Needn't to tell old Scip."

As she entered the hall she heard the rustle of silken garments, and Mrs. Falconer stood before her, with a countenance full of subdued rage.

"How dare you enter that room?" she hissed under her breath. "How dare you prowl thus openly about the house where you have wrought such horror and ruin?"

"Mrs. Falconer!"

"Don't Mrs. Falconer me in that soft, whining voice!" uttered the lady, fiercely. "I am no weak, silly old man, to be infatuated by your airs and graces. That you are not in jail now is your good luck, not your merit; but that you should strut around as calmly as if that stain of blood was not on your hand—that is too much! Go to your room, and hide that doll face of yours from very shame. I give you until to-morrow morning to find a home; that is more than most persons treated



as I have been would allow you. To-morrow you will leave the shelter of this roof forever."

"What have I done to be thus turned out of doors?" Gratia wailed. "If Colonel Falconer were at home I should not be without a friend."

"It is like your brazen-faced insolence to think that you could captivate him also," Mrs. Falconer rejoined, in hot wrath.

Gratia shrank back and colored scarlet at the unlooked for interpretation that Hugo Falconer's mother had put upon her words.

"Ay, you may well cower. But Hugo would never allow his uncle's house to be turned into a harboring place for murderers. I have borne much for his sake. I have endured a great deal, because he left you, as it were, in my charge; but the limits of endurance have been long since over-passed. Go, I say, and let me not see your face again."

Gratia made no answer. She knew well that any words of hers would only be as fresh fuel to the flame of the virtuous matron's indignation.

"How came you to admit her into that room, Scipio?" angrily demanded his mistress. "Had you no sense of propriety?"

"Well, ma'am," said Scipio, sturdily, "we all on us done has our own 'pinions on dis subjeck, an' mine is dat Miss Gratia, she's as innocent of knowin' any t'ing 'bout dis yar murder as your own darter, ma'am. An' I hadn't no orders to let no one in pa'tic'lar in, nor keep no one in pa'tic'lar out."

"Fool!" cried the lady, sweeping past him, and deigning no further notice.

Gratia Kempfield had gone up to her own apartment with a sense of frightful desolation and solitude about her. She had not a friend in the world to whom she could apply in this hour of sorest need; and she dropped her head on her hands and cried out in her agony.



Almost at the same moment there was a tap on the door, and a light, halting step on the threshold.

"Come back, miss," cried the voice of Joanna, subdued to a tone below its natural pitch. "It's against your grandmama's express orders ; it's as much as my place is worth to let you in there."

"I don't caare," uttered the voice of Ida. "I *will* go to her!"

And the next moment her arms were round her adopted sister's neck, her velvet cheek pressed close to Gratia's hot forehead.

"Don't cry, Gratia," she sobbed, her own eyelashes wet with fast flowing tears. "*I* love you, Gratia. The whole world sha'n't make me believe you guilty."

The sweet, trusting child's cries reached a yet sentient chord in the fast benumbing heart.

"I thank you for those words, Ida," said the young girl. "I shall remember them always, wherever I may go."

"You will not leave me, Gratia?"

"I must, dear Ida."

"But you promised papa you would always be my sister—always!" cried Ida, tightening her grasp round Gratia with an apprehensive movement.

"Your father never could have foreseen the circumstances in which I am placed," Gratia replied, sorrowfully. "Your grandmother herself has turned me out of doors."

"But it is not grandmamma's house."

"Yes, it is—*now*, Ida."

The little girl was silent ; she felt the force of Gratia's words.

"But you promised," she reiterated, amid her sobs ; "you promised."

"I cannot help that, Ida ;" and Gratia, reaching a crimson velvet case from her dressing-bureau, opened it, disclosing a superb set of large and lustrous pearls—necklace, bracelets, brooch, and ear-pendants. "See, dearest!"



"What are they?" Ida asked, lifting her heavy eyes to the other's wan face.

"The pearls your Uncle Ralph gave to me for a wedding-gift. I wanted to return them to him, but he would not allow it. I cannot keep them now; every pearl seems like a tear shed over his grave. Oh, Ida," she wailed, clasping her hands wildly together, "and they dare to say that *I* murdered him!"

"Keep the pearls, Gratia; they are yours," said Ida, in accents of awe.

"Not for worlds!" Gratia exclaimed, passionately. "Neither the pearls nor *this*," tearing the diamond engagement-ring from her slender forefinger. "I can cherish his memory without the aid of outward signs or tokens. Leave me now, Ida; I must have a little solitude, to look my new future in the face and decide what step next to take."

"Where are you going, Gratia?"

"I don't know—anywhere, away from here."

"But what will you do?"

Gratia laughed hoarsely.

"I shall *live*, Ida, I don't doubt. Only the favored children of fate are taken—those who, like little Raymond, are dear to the angels."

"Have you got money?"

"Enough for all my present needs, Ida. No," as the little girl hesitatingly drew out her tiny gold-beaded purse, "I want no more. I have a good wardrobe, thanks to your father's generosity, and a little store of money. And when he comes back, darling," she added, wistfully, "*you* will tell him how wrongfully they suspected me."

For Gratia had never felt until that moment how very dear Colonel Hugo Falconer's good opinion was to her.

"I will, Gratia, I will!" the child answered, weeping passionately. "Oh, how cruel and unjust this world is! Why, why cannot Uncle Ralph speak from the other world and tell us who it was that killed him?"



“We shall know some day,” Gratia solemnly answered, “and in the meanwhile I must bide my time. Good-by, darling!” and she gently put Ida from her. “Joanna, come and take your young mistress away. Obey Mrs. Falconer, and do not let her come to me again.”

But Ida clung with passionately tender affection to Gratia's neck.

“When will you come back, Gratia?”

“I cannot tell,” Gratia replied. “My future seems to have passed entirely away from me. I am trying to trust in God's providence, but it seems very, very hard. Once more, dearest, good-by!”

She pressed her lips in a long, lingering caress to Ida's, and the next moment she was alone.

The next morning, when Ida came to her friend's room, Gratia had gone.

---

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### AGAINST WIND AND TIDE.

During the next few weeks Gratia Kempfield drank the bitter cup of humiliation to the very dregs. She had succeeded in finding a cheap though respectable lodging at the house of a woman who eked out her income by letting her upper rooms to people who boarded themselves—factory girls, sewing women, and the like, who were absent all day, and only wanted a decent roof to shelter their heads at night. Mrs. Carkley promised to interest herself in her new lodger's future, but she had no very promising hopes to hold out.

“Situations is scarce,” said she, “and wages is low. They say money is awful tight—seems to me it always is.”

Mrs. Carkley was a tall, sallow-faced woman, who wore rusty-black garments in memory of a husband who had departed this



life some twenty odd years before, and always spoke in a subdued voice, as if thoroughly ground down by the cares and troubles of life.

Day after day Gratia sallied forth, eager to solve the riddle of her subsistence; night after night she returned home weary and sick at heart, with every limb aching from the unwonted exertion.

Jenny Jackson, a cheerful little sewing-machine girl, who occupied the room next to Gratia's, heard that there was a vacancy in the establishment of Madame Sainter, the fashionable Broadway milliner, and she went with Gratia as far as the side door. Madame Sainter herself sat at a tall desk studying the pages of her ledger and day-book, as Gratia was shown in by a frowsy-headed servant-maid.

"Eh?" said madame, sticking the pen-handle in among her curl-papers. "The situation, eh? Exactly. Could you come straight off? We are driven to death."

"At once, madame."

"And what can you do?" she asked.

"Almost anything, madame. I am quick with my needle."

"I give a dollar and seventy-five cents a week," said madame, belligerently, as if she expected a battle on the question of wages; "and my girls are provided with a lunch in the middle of the day—I can't have 'em galloping home at the busiest time of day, and coming back all grease and tea-leaves."

"I shall be contented with that, madame, until I have convinced you that I can earn more," said Gratia, quietly.

"Take off your things," said madame, brusquely; "go into the other room, and Mademoiselle Theresine will set you at work at once. Stop, though—you haven't told me your name."

And Madame Sainter dipped her pen in the ink, and looked at Gratia expectantly, ready to enter it in her books.

"My name is Gratia Kempfield,"



The pen dropped from madame's fingers—she drew back instinctively.

“You will not do for me,” she said, regarding Gratia with the horror wherewith one views a venomous reptile.

“Why not, Madame Sainter?”

“I made a mourning hat for Mrs. Falconer last week, and she told me all about it. You will not do for me,” reiterated madame, still holding back her skirts, as if fearing lest they should come in contact with Gratia's plain linsey dress.

“What did they tell you?” asked Gratia, feeling herself turn sick and cold.

“I don't want a discussion,” said madame. “I suppose I have a right to employ or not to employ whom I please.”

The next opportunity seemed more promising. It was one which Gratia had caught a glimpse of through the advertising columns of a morning newspaper—the situation of companion to an elderly lady. The address was in a quiet, old-fashioned street, where the very cart-wheels had a sleepy, respectable sound as they bumped over the paving-stones.

Mrs. Osard was the lady who had advertised—a fat, cozy, white-haired matron in spectacles and black satin, who was very deaf, very quiet, and very much addicted to wanting the newspapers read to her every day and all day.

“You've got a good, clear voice, child!” she said, with one hand to her ear, as Gratia shouted out her claims to consideration, “and you don't run your words together, as half of 'em do. I like that. Do you like reading aloud?”

Gratia said she did—she would almost have answered “yes” if Mrs. Osard had asked her if she liked gathering nettles or being broiled on a gridiron.

“Yes, yes, that's good,” said the old lady, nodding her head until the silver curls on either side of her temples nodded too.

“I'm not very exacting—all I want of you is too read to me, mend my laces, and look a little bit after the housekeeping—servants need a mistress' eye over them all the time nowadays—



and drive with me in the park. The doctor says daily exercise is of great importance to me. And I shall want you to take Flora, my spaniel, out for a walk, between twelve and one, in pleasant weather."

"Yes, ma'am, all those things I could do," said Gratia, feeling her heart warm more and more to the kindly old woman.

"And I give twenty dollars a month—but of course I shall always expect to give you a nice little present now and then, if you suit me," added Mrs. Osard, patting her spaniel's head. "Now about your references."

Gratia gave Mrs. Homer's name, rather hesitatingly. The old lady wrote it down in a tiny mother-of-pearl set of tablets that lay on the table beside her.

"You may come to-morrow, my dear," she said, "and I'll make all necessary inquiries in the meantime."

But Mrs. Osard was old, and there was a good deal of inertia about her, and the January weather was nippingly cold.

"I dare say it's all right," said the old lady. "She wouldn't give the reference if she wasn't prepared to have a good account given of her, and I can call on this Mrs. Homer at any time. She has got a face like a flower, and I always did believe in faces."

So when Gratia came the next day her room was ready, and the old lady was waiting eagerly to hear the papers read.

After the stormy sea of trial on which the poor girl had been tossed about, Mrs. Osard's cozy parlor seemed like a haven of perfect peace. For the first day or two she could hardly realize that she had a home; but afterward she began better to comprehend the fullness of her good fortune.

Mrs. Osard cared little for society, and went nowhere except for her daily drive through the charming roads of the Central Park. She received but few friends, and they were mostly old ladies of her own stamp.

Gratia had just finished dusting the antique curiosities, which



made the old lady's parlor like a miniature museum, one dreary February morning, and the newspapers lay in a heap on the table ready for the morning session of reading.

"That's right, my dear," said Mrs. Osard, nodding her head, as she watched Gratia's delicate silk duster. "I never had any one tidy my rooms as neatly as you do it. There's a deal in having a knack. I always said so."

The maid whose business it was to attend the door entered just then, and laid a visiting-card on the table. Mrs. Osard scrutinized it through her gold spectacles.

"Ask her to walk in, Rosa," said she, rather slowly, "though I must confess I would rather have had a chance to read the papers before I received calls. No, Gratia; don't go. You may as well stay; I shall not be detained long."

Gratia accordingly resumed her avocation, not even turning her head at the entrance of the visitor, until the shrill, high-pitched tone of a well-known voice caused her to start as if a bomb-shell had exploded close to her ear.

"My dear friend," it uttered, "do you want to be murdered in your bed?"

And Gratia knew in an instant that peace, home, safety, all were gone. Alberta Falconer had tracked her out once more.

"Mercy on me, my dear!" cried Mrs. Osard, jumping up as briskly as her corpulence would allow, and looking under her arm-chair as if she expected to see a man with a bludgeon concealed there; "what do you mean?"

"You may leave the room," said Alberta, turning authoritatively to Gratia. "Your mistress wishes to be alone with me for a while."

Gratia obeyed without a word of remonstrance. She might tell her own story, but she knew it would not be believed.

An hour afterward Rosa came mincingly up stairs, and a single glance at her averted eyes and pursed-up lips convinced Gratia that the whole household was in possession of the tale of her fancied guilt and crime.



"Mrs. Osard wishes to see you in the parlor, Miss Kempfield," she said.

Gratia obeyed the summons, nor was she surprised to see Rosa follow her into the room and take up her position, with a sort of ostentatious guardianship, back of her mistress' chair. Mrs. Osard herself looked nervous and frightened.

"Miss Kempfield," she began, "I have just heard news that deeply shocks and surprises me."

Gratia bowed in silence.

"You never told me," pursued Mrs. Osard, "that you had lived at Mrs. Falconer's."

"No, madam."

"Nor that—that—. But," said the old lady, suddenly jerking herself up, as it were, "I do not see any use in prolonging this interview, which must be quite as painful to you as to myself. I merely wish to tell you that you are from this moment dismissed my service."

"Mrs. Osard!" burst forth Gratia, forgetting all her wise resolutions, "I am as innocent as yourself. I never harmed a hair of his head; pray, pray, believe me."

Mrs. Osard looked more frightened than ever.

"Rosa," she said, in a hurried whisper, "you had better ring for the coachman; it is well to be provided for any emergency. Pray, Miss Kempfield, spare me this unnecessary agitation; it will be of no avail. Here are your wages for a month in advance; I believe I owe you this much, in consideration of the sudden dismissal."

Gratia silently accepted the money which the good old lady pressed upon her, and, with a murmured word of adieu, left Mrs. Osard's presence.

"I declare," cried the old lady, when the door was closed, "I feel sorry for her, for all it's such an awful story. Her face is so sweet and girlish. But then faces are deceitful."



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## SITUATION AS GOVERNESS.

"Back again, be you?" said Mrs. Carkley, when Gratia once more made her appearance and requested to re-engage her old room for the present. "Well, I *did* tell Jane Smith there wouldn't no luck follow your going away from here on a Friday."

In vain Gratia haunted intelligence offices, answered advertisements, and watched with piteous anxiety for every possible opportunity to earn her daily bread in a decent and creditable way; no opening seemed to present itself, and in the meanwhile her wretched little stock of money dwindled and grew less and less, in spite of her endeavors to eke it out by the strictest economy.

Gratia had wept herself to sleep one night, when a soft, warm hand was laid on her forehead. She started up, believing herself to be still in a dream.

"How light you sleep," said Jenny Smith, laughing. "I'm late to-night, because there is a press of extra work on hand; but better late than never, as the proverb says, and that's just what I thought about you."

"About me, Jenny?"

"Yes—about a place for you, you know. I've heard of one I guess you'd like, and I thought maybe you'd sleep better if I told you about it to-night. Mrs. Pennilon wants a governess for her four boys, and I believe you're the very one for the place."

"How old are they?" said Gratia, a little doubtfully.

"Oh, the oldest is only thirteen. *Such* young Turks!" said Jenny. "They come down to the factory sometimes, and you would think it was Bedlam broken loose. They need a gov-



erness if ever children did. Ellen Sypher is Mrs. Pennilon's cousin—she's forewoman in our room—and she was telling me about it. So I mentioned you, and Ellen's of opinion you would just about suit, particularly if you don't want a very high salary."

"I shall be thankful to earn anything," cried Gratia, fervently.

"So I told her," said Jenny. "And you're to call there to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. So now good-night, because likely I'll be off before you are up in the morning."

And Jenny went off, refusing even to listen to Gratia's words of earnest thankfulness.

That night Gratia slept more sweetly by far than she had done since leaving Mrs. Osard's, and the first thought in her head as she waked in the morning was of something hopeful ahead.

The name "PENNILON," in old English letters, on a mammoth silver-plated shield, stared Gratia in the face for full five minutes, during which she stood waiting for some one to answer the bell.

At last the door was opened by a coarsely dressed maid, and Gratia asked to see Mrs. Pennilon, and was shown into a gaudy reception-room.

Presently Mrs. Pennilon, a fat, vulgar matron, trundled into the room.

"So you're Miss Kempfield, are you?" said she, patronizingly motioning her young visitor to be seated.

Gratia inclined her head.

"My cousin Ellen, at the factory, mentioned you to me. What can you teach?"

"I presume," said Gratia, "that I am qualified to take the entire charge of the education of any children under thirteen or fourteen—except Latin. I never have devoted myself to the study of the dead languages."

"Oh, that don't signify," said Mrs. Pennilon, loftily. "No-



body cares about those dry, fusty old languages nowadays. Arithmetic, and algebra, and botany, and such—they is the studies I and Mr. Pennilon approves of.”

“I could teach those,” said Gratia.

“And grammar, and spelling-book, and the alphabet for little Francis. My youngest has always been a delicate child, and we haven’t put him to his book.”

“Certainly,” said Gratia. “How old is he?”

“Oh, he’s nine,” said Mrs. Pennilon. “But he has always disliked learning. I hope you will make it more attractive to him than his other instructors have done.”

“I will try,” said Gratia.

“And the piano?” said Mrs. Pennilon. “My Roswell—he’s the second child—he has the greatest taste for music. You should hear him play ‘Dixie’ with one finger; and he has picked it up entirely by ear.”

“I can teach the elements of music,” said Gratia.

“I want him to learn tunes at once,” pursued Mrs. Pennilon. “I never did like dry exercises.”

“Very well,” assented Gratia. “Of course I should put myself at once under your direction in all these matters.”

“Of course—of course,” said Mrs. Pennilon. “Them that pays should judge—that’s my and Pennilon’s motto. But that ain’t the most important thing. Can you speak French?”

“Yes, madam.”

“Because it is very essential that our governess should be an efficient in the French language. I, and Pennilon, and the boys go to Europe next month.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Pennilon; “and as we are none of us no great hands at picking up a foreign language, you will be of use.”

All Mrs. Pennilon’s questions having been satisfactorily answered, the question of salary was broached.



"Considering all the privileges, twenty-five dollars a quarter is all I can afford to give," said the lady.

"A hundred dollars a year!" repeated Gratia, slowly.  
"That is a very small salary."

"But you know you haven't no recommend!" cried Mrs. Pennilon, forgetting the exigencies of the English language in her excitement.

Finally Gratia concluded to take the position at the salary named, as she did not know when another opportunity would offer.

"Can you come immediately?" Mrs. Pennilon asked.

"At once, if you would prefer it."

Mrs. Pennilon rang the bell.

"Send up the young gentlemen," she said, loftily, and without waiting for any further summons, the "young gentlemen" tumbled spontaneously into the room, an animated heap of arms and legs.

"This is your new governess, boys," said their mother, with a proud glance at her four stubble-headed, freckle-faced, wide-mouthed urchins.

Gratia entered upon the duties of her new position that afternoon, and two months later, when the May sunshine was brightening over the land, she stood on the deck of an outward bound steamer, *en route* for Havre and the continent; while close beside her, Francis Pennilon was devouring peanuts, Roswell was engaged in seeing how nearly he could balance himself on the gangway rail, and Adolphus and Haddy fought for a "picture paper" some one had left on deck.

---

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE MEETING AT MELWORTH HALL.

Travel, regarded in itself, may be infinitely agreeable, but travel with a purse-proud master, a vulgar mistress, and four



unruly boys, has its admixture of the unpleasant, as Gratia found to her cost long before the Madagascar reached the port of Havre.

The Pennilon party remained just a week in London—such a hurried week of sight-seeing that Gratia felt as if it were a fevered dream, and Roswell grumbled that the Tower of London and Tussaud's Waxworks were all fermenting together in his brain.

Warwickshire was the first county in which Mr. Pennilon deigned to pause—an antique country town, called Cheyne Regis, through which murmured the drowsy tides of a beautiful river. There was an ancient church to be seen here, full of quaint illuminations, and moss-grown tombs, and an old ruin on the hill-side, and that was all."

"What made papa stop at this slow place?" said Hadley, yawning fearfully, the morning after their arrival. "There's nothing going on, not even a circus."

Gratia could not help smiling at the boy's idea of lively "goings on."

"I believe," said she, "that that rich hardware man in London——"

"Old Knives-and-Forks?" interrupted Adolphus. "You needn't look so solemn, Miss Kempfield; it's what his coachee called him. I drove all round the square alongside of the coachee, while papa was in the parlor with the old man. He let me take the reins twice, and I gave him a shilling—I did."

"His name was Carstell," said Gratia, gravely; "and he gave your papa a card to admit him to look at a very splendid country place here—Melworth Hall, it is called—where there are some very fine statues and pictures."

"Hang the statues and pictures!" said the irreverent Adolphus. "I'm going after trout with the landlord's brother. We're going to take our lunch with us, and bring home trout enough for all the family supper, see if we don't."

And Master Adolphus kept to his resolution, so that the



party for Melworth Hall were forced to set off, in a jingling, open carriage, without him.

It was a long drive, and not a pleasant one, although the lanes were starred with daisies, and overhung by trails of dog-roses and honeysuckle, while blossoming orchards freighted the air with perfume, and wheat meadows, walled in by peaceful woods, afforded the loveliest of perspectives. Mrs. Pennilon's corns were troublesome, and she had spilled a cup of coffee on her new gray traveling-dress that morning. Mr. Pennilon was absorbed in a sheet of statistics concerning the steel trade in Sheffield; and Francis, Roswell, and Hadley were fighting for the best place in the carriage. Gratia herself was compelled to ride backward, which always made her uncomfortable; so, upon the whole, she was not sorry when they drew up in the grounds of Melworth Hall.

"Oh, what splendid trees!" cried Gratia, looking up at the century-old elms, beneath which the carriage rolled, with glimpses of green, shaven turf, and here and there a sparkling fountain, a statue, or a sheet of ornamental water in the distance.

"If you would be a little less theatrical, Miss Kempfield, and pay a little more attention to the children," said Mrs. Pennilon, tartly, "I think there would be less danger of Francis falling out of the carriage."

Melworth Hall was a splendid old mansion—a picturesque jumble of two or three different ages and styles of architecture, with stained glass oriels, inlaid floors, and broad staircases leading to libraries, conservatories, and picture-galleries.

Gratia had lingered in one of the anterooms to look at a stand of passion-flowers and azaleas, while the rest of the family, with the exception of Hadley, had proceeded to the grand drawing-room under the marshaling of the staid old housekeeper, when a party of ladies and gentlemen came down the private stair-way beyond, the door leading to which Mrs. Hopwith had, through some inadvertence, left slightly ajar.



“Oh, Miss Kempfield, look ! look !” cried Hadley, jerking her dress. “What a pretty green velvet riding-habit !”

Involuntarily Gratia lifted her eyes from the azalea stand, and found herself face to face with Colonel Hugo Falconer.

She knew him in an instant, and his recognition of her was almost equally quick, although the year of their separation had altered her in more respects than one. He had left her almost a child, fair to look upon, it is true, but, nevertheless, immature ; she had grown into a beautiful woman, with dreamy, hazel eyes, curls like coiled sunshine, and lips as rare and red as strawberries. Neither had dreamed of seeing the other ; it was like the strange, sudden apparition that sometimes comes to pass in a dream, and for a moment both stood still.

The next minute he had detached himself from the party and stood at her side.

“Gratia, my child ! my adopted daughter ! how come you to be here ?”

Her first impulse was to throw herself into his arms, with a tempest of glad tears ; her next to shrink away. Surely he could not have heard from the United States—he could not know that he was addressing the woman who was said to be the murderess of his uncle !

“I—I am with friends,” she faltered. “We are looking at the hall.”

“And I am staying in the house,” said Colonel Falconer, resolutely retaining the hand she would fain have drawn away.

“Are you at Cheyne Regis or Melworth ? And how does it happen that you are in England ? My darling, do you know that you have grown very beautiful ?”

“Gratia turned red and pale with contending emotions.

“You must not speak so to me, sir,” she faltered ; “you do not know all.”

“What is it that I do not know ? Nay”—as a nattily attired groom came to whisper to him that Mrs. Melworth was waiting—“I must not linger longer now. Where are you



staying? Give me your address, and I will call this afternoon at five."

And almost before she knew what she was doing, Gratia had spoken the name of the White Hart Inn at Cheyne Regis, and he had pressed her hand and gone.

"Well, now," cried Hadley, who had stood open-mouthed and staring all this while, "I'm blessed if this ain't a regular adventure, as good as anything in the dime novels. Who is it, Miss Kempfield? An English lord? And how did you come to be on such jolly good terms with him?"

"Hadley," cried Gratia, turning suddenly toward him, "pray do not speak of this to any one."

"Why shouldn't I? Where's the harm? I'm going to tell mamma this very minute. No, I'm not either," suddenly melting in his mood at sight of Gratia's tears. "Don't cry, Miss Kempfield; I'll be as mum as a mouse."

"Miss Kempfield," said Mrs. Pennilon, sharply, when they had at last reached their room at the inn, "do come here and unlace my boots; my feet feel as if they were on fire. What horrid, stuffy little rooms these are; and people talk so much of the comfort of English inns! I've two minds to ask Pennilon to go away this very afternoon. We could catch the night express at Daylesford, I am very sure."

Gratia's face brightened.

"Oh, Mrs. Pennilon," she stammered, "if you only would!"

"What is it to you whether we go or stay?" snapped the matron. "You are paid to be satisfied wherever we are."

"Yes," faltered poor Gratia, bending once more to her work, "but—but I agree with you that these old places are very wearisome."

"I didn't say anything of the sort," said the lady, with acrimony; "and if I did, I don't want you to agree with me. You are too forward in your opinions, Miss Kempfield. We shall make a point of staying at Cheyne Regis through the rest of the week, in any event *now*!"



## CHAPTER XXIX.

## LONEL FALCONER CALLS.

"I will not see him ! I cannot see him !" Gratia Falconer reiterated to herself as she sat at the window, after dinner, mending a zig-zag rent in one of the velveteen knees of Master Francis' knickerbockers. "He spoke kindly to me at first, it is true, because he was taken by surprise ; but when he comes to remember all the weight of guilt and crime which people have dared to lay upon my shoulders, he will despise me and shrink from he."

As these thoughts careered through her mind the clock struck four. Gratia rose hurriedly, with a changing color, and put away her unfinished work.

"Roswell," she called to the boy who was listlessly examining a book of old-fashioned prints, "don't you want to go for a walk with me among those hazel copses down by the wood?"

Roswell jumped up with alacrity, and they started out.

While they were in the green depths of the hazel copse, Colonel Hugo Falconer was walking leisurely along the country lane which led from Melworth Hall to Cheyne Regis, turning over in his mind all the possibilities which could by any chance have brought Gratia Kempfield to these English shores. For, strange as it may appear, Colonel Falconer had not yet learned more of the particulars of his uncle's death than the mere fact that he had been mysteriously murdered, and this had come to him through the chance mention of a business correspondent.

The package of home letters containing all the details had been delayed until after the sailing of the mail steamer, and reached London the day after he had left it for Constantinople,



where he was in treaty with a firm of Greek bankers. On his return he had stopped at one or two country houses whither his correspondence had been forwarded, with the exception of this single packet, which lay under a tin box at his London agent's, peacefully accumulating cobwebs and dust. The latter epistles of course took for granted that the absent son and brother was acquainted with all the particulars mentioned in the former, and so to this minute Colonel Falconer was in ignorance of the fact that Gratia had left his home.

"It couldn't be possible," he argued within himself, "that Ida has quarreled with Gratia. They were too similar in disposition and temperament, too entirely devoted to each other. I cannot for an instant believe they could seriously differ. It is more probable by far that she has been driven away by the whims and caprices of my mother or Alberta, or possibly"—and his brow instinctively darkened as the hypothesis crossed his mind—"she has been annoyed by my brother Robert's ill-advised admiration. The girl is pretty enough to account for almost any such aberration. I never could have supposed she would have blossomed out into such rich, perfect beauty."

Thus meditating, Colonel Falconer reached the White Hart, at Cheyne Regis, and gave the landlady his card.

"For Miss Kempfield," he said.

Mrs. Powell made an humble obeisance before the dignity of "one of the gentlemen from the Hall."

"Yes, please, sir, it's Mrs. Pennilon's governess, hain't it, sir? Please walk into the parlor."

In a few minutes Mrs. Powell returned.

"Please, sir, Miss Kempfield ain't in."

"Not in? Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure—she be out walking with one of the young gentlemen."

Colonel Falconer looked at his watch; it was just four minutes after five.



"Can I see Mrs. Pennilon?" he asked. That is the name, is it not, of the lady with whom Miss Kempfield is traveling?"

"Yes, sir, that is the name," said Mrs. Powell, and again she trudged up stairs.

Mrs. Pennilon, although she was righteously indignant at the idea of her governess having "followers," was not a little pleased at the intelligence that the gentleman from the Hall wished to see her.

"I hope I have not inconvenienced you, madam," said Colonel Falconer, courteously, as Mrs. Pennilon rustled into the room. "I only wished to make some inquiries of you about your governess, Miss Kempfield."

Mrs. Pennilon's face flushed redder than before.

"Has she been complaining of her situation?" she demanded, angrily.

"Not in the least, madam," said Colonel Falconer, looking somewhat surprised. "But I chanced to see her at Melworth Hall this morning, and made an appointment to call this afternoon at five. Do you know which way she has gone?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Pennilon, primly drawing herself up; "and if I did I should not think it my duty to tell you."

Colonel Falconer's face was more and more perplexed in its expression.

"Perhaps you are unaware, Mrs. Pennilon," he said, "that I am a very old friend of your children's instructress—that I stand almost in the relationship of a father to her?"

"*In-deed!*" said Mrs. Pennilon, with a toss of her head.

"Can you tell me how soon she will return?"

"No, I can't."

Colonel Falconer stood in silence for a moment; then he hurriedly penciled a few words upon a card.

"Will you oblige me by giving her this, madam?" he asked; "and I will no longer intrude upon your valuable time."

Mrs. Pennilon took the card as if it were full-freighted with small-pox, typhoid fever, or some other virulent disease, and



held it between the thumb and finger of her left hand, as she stiffly returned the gentleman's parting bow.

The instant the door closed behind him, she scrutinized the writing on the card, which bore the name "Hugo Falconer," in delicately engraved script letters, and below, the words :

"I will come to-morrow morning, at eleven. Dear Gratia, you will not refuse to see me then?"

"I never knew anything so cool in all my born days!" cried Mrs. Pennilon, indignantly tearing the card and scattering its fragments to the winds.

Gratia Kempfield, standing in the friendly shadows of the hazel copse saw Hugo Falconer pass by shortly afterward, walking slowly, with his hands behind his back, and his eyes fixed intently on the ground, tall and handsome as an Apollo! How her heart warmed toward the gallant gentleman in the one minute in which she trusted her eyes to gaze upon his manly beauty. She was almost tempted to step out from the bowery screen of the hazel bushes, and tell him all the secrets of her breaking heart. But, as she made a step forward, a gay barouche swept down the road with two lovely girls leaning out, and the horses drew up with a jerk.

"We are just in time to drive you home, Colonel Falconer," said Alicia Melworth, gayly. "Are you not obliged to us for saving you such a long, warm walk?"

So Gratia's chance passed by, and her hero was whirled away toward the stately old towers of Melworth Hall.

Master Roswell persisted in staying to fish with his eldest brother, and our heroine walked home alone. Mrs. Pennilon met her, almost at the threshold of the inn.

"You had a fine visitor since you went away, Miss Kempfield," she said, with satirical emphasis on all the most obnoxious words.

"A visitor, Mrs. Pennilon?"

"Altogether too fine for such plain, respectable people as we



are," viciously went on Mrs. Pennilon, and I do not think it safe for me and Pennelon any longer to retain such a *very* attractive young person, as you seem to be, in our service. A month's warning or a month's wages is the understood rule, I believe, so you'll find the money on your table up stairs."

"Mrs. Pennilon," broke faintly from Gratia's quivering lips.

"There's no use 'Mrs. Penniloning' *me*," said the irate matron. "I am not a gentleman, to be taken in by your fine airs and graces. I am only a respectable American mother; and I cannot have my son's morals corrupted by a designing schemer like you. You are dismissed from my service, Miss Kempfield."

---

## CHAPTER XXX.

"WHERE IS SHE?"

Gratia went slowly up stairs to her room feeling as if some sudden blow had descended upon her. She knew Mrs. Pennilon's vindictive and unreasoning temper too well to venture to hope for any good effects arising from remonstrance or expostulation. Homeless, friendless, and in a strange land—did it not seem as if the cup of her tribulations was filled to the brim?

Mrs. Pennilon's service had been no sinecure—her exactions had been almost boundless, and her temper trying in the last degree, but not the less for all that she had been a sort of protectress to the motherless, lonely girl, and now that this ægis had been withdrawn, Gratia felt bitterly her solitary condition.

"I must not think any more about it just now," Gratia murmured to herself, "for I am so tired, and my head aches so



fearfully. I will lie down for a little while and perhaps I shall feel better."

When the next morning dawned she was unable to lift her throbbing head from her pillow.

"I hope you aren't going to be sick, miss," the kind-hearted landlady said, as she brought a cup of coffee to Gratia's bedside.

"Oh, no, only my head aches a little," Gratia answered, wearily. "Thanks, but I could not swallow anything."

"Only just a drop, miss," pleaded Mrs. Powell. "It'll do ye a power of good. There's nothing like good, strong coffee to cure a headache. I've done my very best to stop them halla-ballowin' boys gallopin' up and down the hall past your door, but it's a rainy morning, and they can't go out doors to play, and you'd think that Mrs. Pennilon hadn't no narves o' her own, not to speak o' other people's."

"Let them play—they do not disturb me," said Gratia, drinking a little of the flavorless draught to pacify the well-meaning landlady. "Perhaps I can sleep a little while longer, and then I shall feel better."

And Mrs. Powell tiptoed out of the room, secretly wrathful at Mrs. Pennilon's lack of what she called "nateral feelin'."

At eleven, punctual to the stroke of the clock, Colonel Falconer presented himself, through all the pouring sheets of rain, at the White Hart. Mrs. Pennilon, who had her eye on the strip of road visible from the front window, ever since breakfast, was in the parlor as he entered, sitting straight and stiff, with folded hands, and a countenance expressive of unutterable things.

"Can I have the pleasure of seeing Miss Kempfield this morning?" the gentleman asked, politely, after acknowledging Mrs. Pennilon's presence by a bow, and a few words of matter-of-course greeting.

"I have dismissed Miss Kempfield from my service," Mrs.



Pennilon answered, fixing her eyes hard upon one particular green leaf in the carpet pattern.

"Dismissed her?" Colonel Falconer's eyes flashed. "For what reason, may I ask?"

"I do not feel called upon to render a reason to any one that may ask me," said Mrs. Pennilon; "but I have no objection to telling *you*, sir, since you ask me, that it is because I do not approve of her picking up gentlemen acquaintances upon such *very* short notice."

Hugo Falconer bit his lip to restrain the cutting words he would like to have spoken.

"Do you happen to know, madam," he said, striving for outward self-control, "how long we have known each other?"

"No, sir, I do not; nor do I wish to know."

"Where is she?" asked Falconer.

"I prefer to give no information on the subject."

Colonel Falconer looked at her. If she had only been a man, how much gratification it would have afforded him to have knocked her down. But being a woman, he was debarred from that privilege.

"Is she still with you?"

"I told you that I had dismissed her, sir," tartly enunciated Mrs. Pennilon.

"Is she in this house?"

"No," Mrs. Pennilon answered, laying to her conscience by way of salvo, the fact that the apartment her quondam governess occupied was not actually in the building where they were, but formed part of a sort of wing running out toward the stable-yard.

"Then she has gone to London?"

Mrs. Pennilon neither assented or dissented as he spoke; she simply stared harder than ever at the pattern of the carpet.

He took up his hat.

"That you are clearly misapprehending this whole matter, madam, is sufficiently evident to me," he said. "Perhaps your



own conscience may hereafter reproach you for the course you have taken. At all events, I cannot refrain from expressing my opinion that you have acted in an unchristian and unwomanly manner toward this young girl, to whom you should have been a second mother. Good-morning."

And he walked out of the room and out of the house, resolved to proceed at once to London in search of the beautiful girl who had contrived to work her way so near to his heart.

He walked straight to the railway station, there scribbling a brief note to his friends at Melworth Hall, containing the simple piece of information that an unexpected emergency called him suddenly to London for a few days. This note written and dispatched, he inquired of the ticket agent as to whether such a young person as he described Miss Kempfield had taken a ticket by the London express that morning at eight.

"I don't know any sich in particular, sir. There's a-many comes and goes," he said, rubbing his nose. "Just as like as not I may've sold her the very ticket, and not a-noticed it."

Colonel Falconer shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"When does the next express go?"

"Not before four, sir. There is an accommodation first."

Colonel Falconer looked first at his watch, and then out at the storm-beaten world outside the railway station.

"My poor, poor little Gratia! how cruelly she must have been stung by that woman's taunts before she would flee away like this! How women can be so unfeeling toward one another passes my comprehension. And she is winning and beautiful, too."

Alas! therein lay Gratia Kempfield's first and chiefest offense, had Colonel Falconer but known it.

Three hours afterward Colonel Falconer was in London.

His first move on the complicated chess-board of affairs was to go straight to the office of his lawyer.

Mr. Tessell was a smoke-dried little bachelor, devoted to his profession, and his profession alone, whose house adjoined the



dingy little den he called his "office," and who was scarcely ever away from home.

Late though it was, the colonel found him smoking a huge meerschaum in the window which commanded a view of a forlorn brick-paved court.

"Walk in, colonel, walk in!" said Mr. Tessell, who was never surprised at anything. "And now, colonel, as I haven't the vanity to suppose you are here without an object, what can I do for you this evening?"

"I want you to find a young lady for me," said Hugo, abruptly.

"Do you?" said Mr. Tessell, in no way amazed. "Who, and when?"

And he listened, with his head on one side like a wise old raven, while the American gentleman told his story.

"Rather a hard task you have set me," he said, after a few minutes' cogitation; "but nothing is impossible. We'll do our best. By the way, here is a packet you should have received before this."

"A packet?" echoed Hugo.

"Letters and things," said the lawyer. "Wait a minute, until I ring for candles—this time of day is neither light nor darkness—and then you can look over them at your leisure, while I just jot down a few notes upon the case you have laid before me."

And then Hugo Falconer read the long-mislaid letters from New York, which related, in all their revolting details, the story of his uncle's murder, and told upon whom the burden of suspicion had unanimously fallen.

Hugo sat staring down at the papers long after he had perused them over and over again; but at last he twisted them into a spiral coil and threw them into the wreathing tongues of flame that leaped and danced in the grate.

"Gratia Kempfield a murderess!" he muttered, between his tightly set teeth. "I will never believe it of that girl, who had



the face of an angel and the heart of a white dove ! They have driven her out into the world among them ; but I am not one to abandon my adopted child so readily. There is some hideous mystery, which will eventually be made clear—some foul play, which cannot always remain undetected. Gratia is innocent, and I shall make it my life's object to prove it to the world. Mr. Tessell !”

The lawyer looked up, with vague eyes that seemed introverted, as it were, as if they were looking over the array of facts stored in the inner recesses of his brain.

“I want you to lose no time in this search. Circumstances have occurred which render haste a matter of the greatest importance. If the police can help you, don't hesitate to summon their aid. If the detective bureau can be of any use, let no expenses be spared.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Tessell ; “just so. Your wishes shall be carried into immediate execution, Colonel Falconer.”

---

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### LEFT ALONE.

Gratia Kempfield lay in the little bedroom in the White Hart Inn, when a sunbeam fell athwart her face. She attempted to raise her hand as if to ward it off, but the hand fell heavily again.

“Don't-ee worry, dear—don't-ee !” said Mrs. Powell, mildly. “Polly, draw that there dratted curtain. Have a drink now—there's a darling !”

Gratia drank obediently before she ventured to ask :

“What is the matter ? Have I been sick ?”

“That you have,” answered Mrs. Powell, carefully wiping the edge of the tumbler with a snow-white napkin. “Two blessed weeks you have lain here, clean out of your head, and



me and Polly waiting upon you—'brain fever' the doctor says—and it's a downright blessing you've got your poor, wandering wits back again. Here comes Sarah Ann with a bowl of chicken broth, piping hot, you're to swallow."

"Where is Mrs. Pennilon?" the young girl asked, faintly.

"My dear, she's gone," said the good woman; "and what I said then I say now—good riddance to bad rubbage. Gone back to her native country, I hope, with all them plaguey young uns, and airs, and graces, and pickin' the bill to pieces, as if Powell and me had set out to cheat 'em from the very beginning. Not but what I'd ha' forgiv' her all the rest if she hadn't left you behind just like a sick poll-parrot. 'If she dies, landlord,' says she, 'she's got money enough in her purse to bury her decent; if not, she'll take care of herself; it's no business of ours.' Now take this broth, and go right to sleep; that's my pretty dearie!"

And while Gratia was trying to tell the good woman how impossible it was for her to slumber again, she drifted peacefully off to sleep.

It was the middle of June before Gratia Kempfield was quite restored to health and strength once again. Mrs. Pennilon, she discovered, on examining her simple effects, had left a quarter's wages behind, in addition to a trifling sum which Gratia possessed, so that she had something wherewith to recompense her good host and hostesses in some degree at least. Five pounds was all that Mrs. Powell could be persuaded to take.

As Gratia had now nearly recovered her health, she felt the necessity of looking for employment again, and she bade her kind friends adieu, starting out with all her belongings in a small satchel. Her purse was very low, and her thoughts involuntarily turned to Colonel Falconer.

"He was kind to me once, when I needed it less than I do now," she thought, "and why should I shrink from appealing to him this time? It will be only a loan that I will ask. I will work my fingers to the bone to pay it back again."



So that instead of keeping straight along the high-road to the London railway station, which the good folks at the White Hart Inn had supposed to be her destination, Gratia Kempfield turned off into the oak-shaded lane which led in the direction of Melworth Hall.

Mrs. Hopwith, the same benign-faced old housekeeper who had shown them over the Hall when she had visited it in company with the Pennilon family, was in her own special little sanctum, and looked up as Gratia hesitatingly advanced.

"I beg your pardon," said Gratia, feeling hot, and tired, and confused, and wondering if she might venture to come into the cool room. "I only came up to inquire for Colonel Falconer."

"Colonel Falconer?" the old lady repeated, slowly. "Yes, yes, I remember now—the tall American gentleman, with the straight nose and the black eyes. What of him, child?"

"I would like to speak to him," said Gratia, humbly.

"That's just what you can't do!" said Mrs. Hopwith, screwing the top onto the jar she was filling with rose leaves.

"Why not?"

"Because he isn't here. He went to London, last Thursday three weeks ago. Dear me!" suddenly hurrying to the door, "why, the child has fainted dead away!"

It was quite true. The heat and fatigue of her walk, the disappointment which greeted her at its close, and the weakness of her physical frame, so recently raised from the bed of illness, was too much for Gratia Kempfield, and she lay on the threshold, looking to the good housekeeper's troubled and pitying eyes like a slender white lily, broken from its stalk.

"Well," cried Mrs. Hopwith, as she sprinkled the marble-pale brow with aromatic vinegar, and rubbed the hands of the prostrate girl, after she had with difficulty lifted her upon a settee which stood against the wall, "if she hain't got for all the world just such a face as that picture in Miss Alicia's dressing-room, with the handkerchief twisted round its head—the Beatrice



Cenci, they call it. Poor, pretty dear!—now I wonder what she could have wanted to see Colonel Falconer for!”

And when Gratia's scattered senses came back to her, she found her head pillowed on a kindly arm, and a gentle hand bathing her forehead and temples with the sweet-smelling vinegar.

“You are very kind,” she said, in a low, tremulous voice. “I—I fear I have been faint. But—did I understand you to say that Colonel Falconer had left the Hall?”

“That was what I was telling you just as you swooned away,” said Mrs. Hopwith. “And if it ain't asking more than I've any business to know, I should just like to hear what it is a girl like you wants of a grand gentleman like Colonel Falconer?”

“I used to know him in the United States,” said Gratia, evasively. “Gone—gone! But I might have expected it,” she added, almost hysterically. “He could not care for me any more, after—after——”

And she checked herself, to Mrs. Hopwith's sore perplexity.

“It makes no difference,” she added, seeing the house-keeper's puzzled face. “You ask what I wanted of him. I wanted help. I thought I might find a friend. Because I am quite alone and friendless in this country.”

“But who are you?” demanded Mrs. Hopwith, more bewildered than ever, “and how came you here?”

“My name is Gratia Kempfield,” said the girl, with slow deliberation, “and I came to Cheyne Regis with a family as governess. I fell ill, and they left me behind.”

“And what are you going to do now?” said Mrs. Hopwith, becoming more and more fascinated with the magnetic shine of the great hazel eyes.

“To starve, I suppose!” Gratia answered, with startling calmness. “I suppose it is what people generally do who have neither friends nor money.”

Good Mrs. Hopwith's heart melted at the look more than at the words.



"My poor dear, you mustn't talk that way," she said. "Let me ring for a cup of tea—I generally take it myself about this time of day—and you've no idea how much better it will make you feel. And then, if you don't mind, you can tell me how it all happened."

Gratia did not dissent from this proposal; in fact, she lacked energy either to say *yea* or *nay*.

"You see," said Mrs. Hopwith, who was a firm believer in the "cup that cheers but not inebriates," "you'll feel so much better after a good cup of tea, made as *I* make it."

---

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### GRATIA AND THE HEIRESS.

The good old woman was right. Our souls and bodies are interwoven in closer relations than we are willing to acknowledge to ourselves, and when one is famished the other cannot thrive. The cup of tea and its relishing little accompaniments refreshed Gratia, and Mrs. Hopwith's openly expressed sympathy also wrought its soothing effect, as Gratia told the simple story of her experience in England.

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Hopwith, setting down her cup. "I *did* think that American woman had a face like vinegar and granite when I showed her over the hall, but I didn't suppose but that she had *some* human feelings about her. I'd like to give her a piece of my mind, that I would. And now I'll tell you what it is, my dear. I like your looks."

"Thank you," said Gratia, smiling faintly.

"I do," reiterated Mrs. Hopwith, "and I like your modest-spoken way. If you was one o' them bold hussies as trades on their good looks to deceive honest folks, I would have naught to say to you; but I believe you're another sort o' person, and I ain't often deceived. You shall stay here with me until you



get another place, and I'll do my best to help you to one as will suit you."

"If I could be of any use to you," hesitated Gratia, scarcely daring to believe the good fortune that was dawning upon her.

"Oh, I'll make you useful, never fear," said Mrs. Hopwith. "You can keep accounts?"

"Oh, yes."

"And use the needle?"

"To be sure."

"Then you can help me with the housekeeping books, and the linen, and the preserve jars, and half a hundred other things, until so be as you find a situation to your mind."

So Gratia Kempfield became, for the time being, a sort of lieutenant to the housekeeper at Melworth Hall.

Upon rainy days Gratia amused herself by wandering through the great corridors and show-rooms of the Hall. She scarcely ever met any one, and when she did, was never addressed; but there were times when the sound of gay voices and merry laughter in the inhabited regions of the Hall gave her a homesick sensation; and then it seemed to her as if she would gladly give ten years of her life-time to be once more on the shores of her native land.

About Hugo Falconer she had made up her mind. Had he really cared to see her he would have repeated his visit to the White Hart Inn at Cheyne Regis. She knew his determined disposition too well to believe that he would abandon any purpose that really lay near his heart, after one, or even two repulses.

"He has ceased to care for me," she thought, with a chill sensation at her heart. "I knew that, on second thoughts, he would shrink from me. Yet that one kind look, that cordial grasp of the hand—oh, they make *this* cruel neglect all the harder to bear!"

Mrs. Hopwith had told her that she thought she could easily obtain for her Colonel Falconer's address from one of the



ladies, but Gratia told her, calmly, that she did not wish for it now.

“Just as you please, my dear,” said the old lady. “I don’t myself believe in young girls having too much to say to grand gentlemen, although far be it from me to breathe a word against the colonel, as has been a honored guest of Sir Hugh’s and my lady. And besides all that, Hendon, the butler, did say—though, o’ course, you and me know what servants’ gossip amount to—that our Miss Alicia and the colonel were great friends, and asked me what would I think if Miss Melworth went to America to live after all.”

Gratia was silent ; for the instant she *could* not have spoken.

“You haven’t seen Miss Alicia?” said Mrs. Hopwith, proudly. “I must make an errand for you to Marguerite, her maid, some day, just to let you get a peep of her. The prettiest creetur you ever set eyes on.”

“Is she fair or dark?” Gratia asked, in a low voice, scarcely able to account for the sharp pang of jealousy that shot through her heart at Mrs. Hopwith’s words.

“As fair as a lily, with cheeks like one o’ them big damask roses, and hair that shines and glitters just like sunshine.”

So Mrs. Hopwith wandered on, and poor Gratia thought she never would have done, but just then she was called away by the butler. And the passionate fountain of tears that burst from her eyelids, and the burning sensation at her heart, told Gratia the secret she had long refused to acknowledge to herself—that she loved Hugo Falconer.

“I am a fool—a mad, silly, dreaming fool,” she told herself. “But I can at least hide my folly in my own breast. I *will* live it down.”

And conscious that solitude and opportunity to indulge in thought and memory were her worst enemies, Gratia hurried away to Mrs. Hopwith to beg for some employment, however uncongenial, wherewith to occupy her fingers and brain.



"Can you dress hair?" the old lady asked.

"Yes; why?"

"Praised be Providence for that!" said the old house-keeper, devoutly. "Marguerite, my lady's maid, went up to London by the morning express, and she was to be back by four at the latest, and here she hasn't come yet, and there's a dinner party of five folks at seven, and no one to dress Miss Alicia's hair. Do you think you could undertake it?"

"I could try," said Gratia, smiling at the solemnity with which Mrs. Hopwith asked the question. "There was a French *coiffeur* used to come every day to the house where I lived to dress the young ladies' hair, and I used to watch him work, and then afterward try the effect on my own hair."

"Well, that is what I call good luck," said Mrs. Hopwith. "Get yourself ready, and I'll take you up to Miss Alicia's rooms at once."

"I *am* ready," said Gratia, quietly.

"Come then; I suppose there's no time to lose, as we'll have to look out for some one else in case you don't happen to suit my young lady."

Miss Hopwith led the way into Miss Alicia's boudoir, where, upon a low divan, lounged the prettiest little fairy Gratia had ever looked upon—the self-same young beauty whose carriage had whirled Hugo Falconer away from her that sunny May afternoon.

A full-grown woman, too, although modeled after the most exquisitely petite fashion—an elf-like creature, with great blue eyes, and scarlet lips, and a daintily grained complexion, like roses and snow, and a profusion of magnificent golden hair, which hung loose over her blue muslin wrapper. She looked up, a sweet, surprised look coming into her eyes, as Mrs. Hopwith executed an elaborate courtesy before her.

"This is the young person, Miss Alicia, if you please."

Foolish Gratia! She felt the scarlet blood tide up into her cheeks at the eminently respectable epithet applied to her by



Mrs. Hopwith. Humble and untitled though she was, there was enough of the American spirit about her to feel that she was yet Miss Alicia Melworth's equal in everything, except the accident of birth.

"So you are Hopwith's new *protegee*, of whom we have all heard so much," said Miss Melworth, in a tone so frankly good humored as at once to neutralize the sting in Gratia's heart.

"Why, you are very pretty!"

She spoke innocently, as she might have spoken of a picture or a flower, or a piece of emblazoned sunset sky.

Gratia smiled and colored, and unconsciously looked prettier than ever.

"Do you think you could do my hair?" demanded the young *patricienne*, with pretty imperativeness.

"Yes."

"That is bravely spoken!" said Miss Melworth, sitting up, and pointing to a low toilet-chair which Mrs. Hopwith hastened to bring her. "You may try it, although I warn you I am terribly hard to please."

"I am not afraid of failure," said Gratia. "May I begin at once?"

"At once; and, Hopwith, don't stand staring at her; you will make the poor thing nervous."

"No, she will not," said Gratia, as she selected a pearl-backed brush from the dressing-case on the table, and began skillfully manipulating the long, shining tresses.

"How nicely you handle it!" said Alicia, nestling back against the chair. "Your hands are like velvet, and you don't pull a hair the wrong way."

"There, Miss Melworth," said Gratia, composedly, handing the young heiress a hand-glass as she completed her task; "how do you like that?"

Alicia uttered an exclamation of delighted admiration.

"Charming! perfect!" she exclaimed. "Marguerite herself never made it look half so beautiful and abundant. And you



were so expeditious about it, too. You are a perfect pearl of hair-dressers."

"Only an amateur," said Gratia, smiling. "Last month I was a governess, three months since a companion to a lady, and before that——" Here she checked herself for an instant, and then resumed: "And in the future, nobody knows what I am to be."

"You shall be my maid, if you will come," Alicia Melworth cried, enthusiastically. "I've been tired of Marguerite's shuffling French ways this long time, and nothing on earth but my natural indolence has debarred me from making a change. Can you read aloud well!"

"I think so."

"Try."

Alicia put a volume of Tennyson's "Idyls of the King" into her hands, and opened the passage where the "Sweet Elaine" breaks her heart for love of Sir Launcelot. The deep crimson rose to Gratia's brow; she was familiar with the poem, and it suggested an analogy to the secrets of her own heart. No wonder, then, that she read it with a beauty and pathos of expression that fairly electrified Miss Melworth.

"Splendid!" she cried. "What an actress you would have made! I couldn't endure Marguerite's drawling accent after *that*. Now for the more practical question—can you take care of lace, and India shawls, and jewels, and ermine, and all that sort of thing?"

"Certainly I can."

"And are you very patient and much enduring? Because I warn you, honestly, that I'm a terrible trial to my maids."

"I shall endeavor to endure you," said Gratia, with a gravity that made Alicia laugh; while Mrs. Hopwith stood looking on beamingly, convinced that the golden goblets of fortune had fallen into her young friend's grasp.

"And how much wages do you expect? Marguerite calls it *salary*."



"What you think I am worth, Miss Melworth—neither more nor less."

"Twenty-five pounds a quarter? It is what I have given Marguerite."

"I shall be more than satisfied."

"And you will try me?"

"If you will try me, Miss Melworth."

"To commence?"

"Now."

"Good!" said Alicia, gravely. "You have a mind of your own, and I like you for that. Go into my bedroom and find out where things are. I shall wear a green silk dress to-night. It hangs in yonder mirror-fronted wardrobe."

---

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

"SO NEAR, AND YET SO FAR!"

Gratia Kempfield found Miss Melworth the sweetest and most indulgent of mistresses. The latter had at once perceived the native originality and cultivated refinement of her new attendant.

"I shall make her more of a companion than a maid, mamma," she said to Lady Melworth, speaking of her last acquisition. She is *so* nice, and so pretty."

"Don't spoil her, my dear, I beg," said Lady Melworth. "You remind me of your youthful raptures over the latest new doll."

"But she is a *live* doll; and, oh, mamma, don't *you* think her pretty?"

"I think her rarely beautiful, Alicia; but in her class of life, I am not sure that beauty is altogether a blessing."

"In her class, mamma!" repeated Miss Melworth, arching her golden brows. "But what is her class of life? You



know the Americans are so different from us ; and she has some delicate, dainty ways that would do no discredit to a duchess."

Meanwhile, Gratia's life-stream seemed to roll along over golden sands and through green shores. And so the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into months.

"You must make me more than ordinarily fascinating to-night, Gratia," said Alicia Melworth, entering her dressing-room one evening in October. "We are to have a gay party from London to dinner—some of Algernon's friends."

"Is your brother coming too?" Gratia asked. She had seen Major Melworth once or twice—a tall, dark, handsome man, as unlike his sprite-like little sister as it is possible for two human creatures to be.

"Yes ; and oh, by the way, that American gentleman is coming too. Don't you remember I told you about him."

"Do you mean Colonel Falkland?" Gratia asked, with innocent hypocrisy.

"*Falconer*," Alicia enunciated, with great distinctness. "I like him immensely, even if he weren't Algernon's especial friend. He is *so* handsome and agreeable ; I must contrive some way for you to see him."

"You must not—indeed, indeed, you must not!" exclaimed Gratia, clasping her hands nervously, and letting fall the long golden braid she had just uncoiled from Miss Melworth's head. "I—I have a horror of strangers—I have no curiosity to see him. Please, Miss Melworth, don't."

"You dear little retiring thing !" said Alicia, laughing heartily. "Of course I won't, if you don't wish it. But I know you would think him a perfect Apollo."

Gratia did not answer, but kept on unbraiding the yellow strands with trembling haste.

"You are nervous to-night," said Alicia. "There's enough of what the mesmerists call *rapporte* between you and me for me to feel it in the touch of your cold little fingers."



Alicia was dressed at last, and gone down into the drawing-room, and Gratia, weary and listless, had crept down the side staircase into the room where she had stood on that eventful May day when Hugo Falconer had seen and spoken to her.

Suddenly the sound of a well-known voice struck on her ear—the voice of Hugo Falconer.

Why had she come thither? she asked herself. She might have known that he must pass that way up to his room to dress for dinner, yet the possibility of a meeting never had presented itself to her mind. Instinctively she drew back into the shadow, as he passed within a few feet of her, talking to Mr. Melworth on some passing topic.

Within a few feet of the girl whom he had been seeking so urgently and persistently for months. What would Hugo Falconer have given for the chance that lay so near him now?

“He shall never, never know that the same roof shelters us both,” she murmured to herself, as she fled like a guilty person up the side stair-way and into the pretty little room that Alicia had allotted to her use, where she threw herself on the low sofa and wept as though her heart would break.

Gratia was heavy-eyed and silent the next day when she came as usual to dress Alicia for the late Melworth Hall breakfast, and the latter noticed it.

“How pale you are,” she said; “and I have been telling Algernon all sorts of stories about your pretty face.”

Gratia was rosy enough now.

“Miss Melworth!”

“Don’t look so savagely at me, Gratia!” laughed the young lady. “I only said you weren’t absolutely ugly, that’s all. He is decidedly an artist in his tastes, and sketches charmingly from real life; so I thought you might do as a model head for one of his crayons, that’s all.”

Gratia was silent, but in her inmost mind she resolved that Major Algernon Melworth should never have the opportunity



to indulge any such artistic inclinations, so far as *her* face was concerned.

"We shall only have my brother with us for a few days," Alicia went on. "And Colonel Falconer leaves this evening."

"Does he?"

"To return very soon to America, I believe. *I* should like to see America," said Miss Melworth, with sudden enthusiasm.

"It is the most beautiful country in the whole world," Gratia burst forth fervently; "the fairest, best, noblest land that ever the sun shone on."

And then she began to weep softly, the tears dropping into the folds of Alicia Melworth's white alpaca dress. The young lady saw the effort she made to repress her emotion, and wisely took no notice of it.

"Gratia," she said, "I wish you would just run down into the rose-garden and ask Anderson for a pretty spray of those cream-white bride-roses. They are so fragrant and delicate, and I like to wear them in my hair at breakfast."

Gratia hurried away, without perceiving the kindly ruse which was meant to give her an opportunity to recover herself.

"She'll feel better when she comes back," said Alicia to herself, as she took up a novel. "Poor little thing! She must be dreadfully homesick. If Colonel Falconer had a wife or a sister going back with him I would almost beg her to take Gratia along. I am getting very much attached to the dear little creature, but it seems almost as cruel as it would be to cage a wild bird to keep her here against her will."

While these thoughts were passing through Alicia Melworth's gentle heart, Gratia was hurrying across the lawn, her face shaded by the broad brim of a gipsy hat.

"Anderson," she said to the gardener, "Miss Melworth wants a bunch of those white bride-roses."

"A bunch, indeed!" echoed the old man, holding up his hands. "An' disna Miss Alicia ken that roses is as scarce as



frosts in midsummer? A bunch! I might get her one, or forbye twa, but nae mair."

"As many as you can find, then," said Gratia.

Just beyond was a glass propagatory house, where Anderson kept a long table of young plants, ready for the next season's borders, and an impulse of idle curiosity induced Gratia to enter this building.

As she did so, a perfume of Havana cigars blended itself with the aromatic odor of the moss-roses, and she saw, entering the farther end of the walk she had just quitted, two gentlemen—Colonel Falconer and Algernon Melworth.

Her heart throbbed quickly—a sort of mist crept over her eyes—but she had the presence of mind to remain perfectly still in her lurking-place, although Colonel Falconer almost brushed against the skirt of her dress as he passed the half-open door of the hot-house.

"And you won't stay for the Christmas shooting?" Major Melworth said, as he broke one of Anderson's pet roses ruthlessly from its stem.

"You are most kind, Melworth," Colonel Falconer returned, slowly, "but I have definitely decided to take passage in the Siren, that leaves on the first of November."

"So soon?"

"Yes, because— Here comes the old King of the Roses himself," Hugo cried, breaking short off in his sentence. "Mr. Anderson, you have excelled yourself in autumn roses this season."

"Ye're pleased to say sae, sir" said Anderson, gravely. "But—where is Miss Alicia's maid?"

"Not here, assuredly," said Melworth. "But come on, Falconer, to the stables, and let me have your opinion of that new hunter I have just invested a hundred guineas in."

"Then she must hae gann een," said the old man, wrathfully. "And me been and cut the white roses. But I'll na



gang after her—na, na, old Donald Anderson's white roses ne'er went begging yet."

He was turning away in the fullness of his indignation, when Gratia hurriedly glided out of the hot-house and took the roses from him.

But when Gratia Kempfield came back with the roses in her hand, Alicia thought that she looked paler than ever.

"My dear child," she said, "your cheeks rival the bride-roses. Are you sure that you feel well?"

"I am perfectly well, Gratia answered. "Are you ready for me to do your hair, Miss Melworth?"

---

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### HOME AGAIN.

Colonel Falconer left Melworth Hall without ever knowing that the girl who had once been his adopted child, and was now the cherished darling of his heart, was under its ancestral roof. He returned to London, sad and dispirited, only to learn from Mr. Tessell that all the vigorously prosecuted inquiries had proved fruitless.

"In fact, my dearest friend," said Mr. Tessell, nodding his head conclusively, "the girl is not in London at all. If she had been, we should certainly have been able to lay our hands on her before now. We shall have to give it up, Colonel Falconer."

Hugo bit his lip.

"I will *never* give it up, Mr. Tessell," said he, resolutely. "Matters beyond my own personal control render it necessary that I should return to the United States very soon; but when my uncle's estate is settled, and business affairs are put into some sort of shape, I shall most assuredly return to London and resume the search. In the meantime, Tessell, I want



your functionaries never once to cease their vigilance. Do you understand me? The search is to go steadfastly on while I am gone."

"And if we discover a clew?"

"Then telegraph to me at once."

"As you say, colonel. And when do you leave?"

"Next week, on the Siren."

And when the Siron steamed out of Southampton, Hugo Falconer was on board.

Gratia knew it. She heard Lady Melworth and her daughter speak lightly of what a charming day the Siren had to commence her voyage, and a stifling sensation came into her throat.

The Christmas holidays came and went. There was the usual rejoicing among the tenantry of Melworth, and merry-making for high and low, yet to Gratia Kempfield it was all a mere outward show.

One night, just after there had been a dinner-party in the neighborhood, to which the family of the Hall had gone, and as Gratia sat musing by the fire in Alicia's dressing-room, she could hear the carriage drive up on its return.

Miss Melworth came in, looking radiantly lovely in a pale-green silk, with a white lace scarf twisted about her pearly shoulders, and shining pendants of emeralds and diamonds in her ears.

"Gratia, dear," said Miss Melworth, as she came into the room—for the young girls had become more companions than anything else—"I told you not to sit up for me."

"It is not late," pleaded Gratia, apologetically.

"It is after eleven," said Miss Melworth, glancing at her watch. "But, after all, Gratia, I am not sorry that you are up to hear my news."

"What news?" asked Gratia.

"Guess," laughed the young heiress, letting herself sink



gracefully upon a low velvet couch opposite to where Gratia stood.

"I cannot possibly imagine."

"I shall have to change the style of my interrogatories. How would you like to return to America?"

"What can you mean, Miss Melworth?" breathlessly gasped Gratia.

"Just what I say, my dear. Because we are all going—Lord and Lady Chichester, and Lord Barron, papa, Algernon, and I."

"To America, Miss Melworth!"

"Yes; why not. I declare!" cried Alicia, with a merry laugh; "one would think a voyage across the Atlantic one of the impossibilities. We are going early next month, and you shall accompany us, if you choose."

Gratia Kempfield's homesick heart gave a joyous upward leap at the idea. It was like a glad, impossible dream to her—and none the less because *he* was there.

"It's rather a sudden idea," went on Alicia, "but the Chichesters have been talking about it for some time, and when papa turned round to me and said, 'Shall we go, Alicia?' I answered, 'With all my heart, papa,' and so it was arranged. Mamma does not like the idea of a sea voyage, so she is to remain at the Hall, with plenty of visitors to cheer her loneliness."

And Gratia was fully able to sympathize in Miss Melworth's innocent delight.

"Of course we shall meet Colonel Falconer again," went on Alicia, who was in the highest possible spirits. "He has so often spoken to us about his mother and sister, and their home on Fifth avenue, and his little daughter. Did I ever tell you, Gratia, that he was a widower, with one child?"

"Only one?" asked Gratia, faintly.

"That is all," Miss Melworth answered, and poor Gratia's heart sank like a stone in her bosom. She might have known



it—*only* one ; the other, the adopted daughter of his heart, had long since proved herself unworthy of the title, and been cast out of his affections.

The next few days were passed in the pleasant excitement of packing, and all the numberless preparations that are incident to a contemplated journey.

---

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### DRIVEN TO BAY.

It was a bright February afternoon in New York. There was no snow on the ground, but the trees in Madison Park were all hung with a diamond fringe of icicles, which tinkled like myriads of tiny bells in the wind. Broadway and Fifth avenue were crowded with elegant equipages and superbly attired promenaders ; and everything looked like a gala day to Alicia Melworth's enchanted eyes as she sat at the window of her parlor, in a marble-fronted hotel, gazing out upon the dazzling scene which met her glance.

"I declare, Gratia," she cried, with pretty enthusiasm, "I don't wonder you were homesick. This New York of yours is like a leaf out of a book of Eastern fairy tales ; it seems as if all in the city were enjoying themselves. And after that delightful drive in Central Park yesterday, I'm perfectly wild to go again ; but the Chichesters have got some other programme marked out for this afternoon, and papa and Algernon expect visitors, I believe. Gratia, don't you think you and I might slip on our things and just go for a little walk all by ourselves?"

"I do not see why not," said Gratia.

"Oh, dear, here comes somebody to frustrate our plan!" said Alicia, as there came a knock at the door.

It was a waiter, with some cards for Miss Melworth.



"I suppose they must come in," said Alicia, looking rather disconsolate.

"At home, ma'am?" asked the waiter, evidently prepared to report any message they might choose to give.

"Of course," Miss Melworth answered. "And request Sir Hugh to join us at once. Don't go, Gratia—you are secluded enough in the recess of the window, I am sure."

"But I had better go," said Gratia, nervously.

"Indeed you shall not," said Alicia, with the resolute air she could assume at will. "Sit still—you've no idea as to whom our distinguished visitors are. Only think——"

She stopped, with a rising color, as the door was thrown open, and the waiter respectfully announced :

"Mrs. and Miss Falconer."

Gratia felt as if every drop of blood in her body was changed to globules of congealed ice. Involuntarily she shrank farther back behind the sheltering folds of the lace window-curtains, and bent as closely over her sewing as if each stitch required to be taken with microscopic delicacy, while the well-known voices of Mrs. Falconer and Alberta chatted away. After the first terror of their advent was over, Gratia began to hope that they might go away without even perceiving her. Emboldened by this possibility, she ventured to lift her eyes and cautiously steal a glance or two now and then at the ladies.

"We thought, perhaps," said Alberta, winningly, "that we could persuade you to accompany us on a short drive up to the park this afternoon, Miss Melworth. The air is delightfully fresh, and it is a pity not to improve the few brief hours of sunshine that we can steal from the short winter days."

"You are very kind," said Alicia, "but we were there yesterday, and I believe Lady Chichester has some other plans for this afternoon. I scarcely think she can have received your cards. Gratia," turning suddenly around, "will you be so kind as to knock at Lady Chichester's door and ask her to join me here?"



For an instant Gratia sat perfectly still, her heart throbbing tumultuously.

Then, resolving to face whatever fate might be in store, she rose, and putting aside the draperies which had hitherto shielded her from observation, crossed the room, and passed through the door opposite, in full view of Alberta Falconer's observant eyes.

The instant the door closed behind her retreating figure, Miss Falconer threw up her hands with a gesture of horror and amazement.

"My *dear* Miss Melworth," she exclaimed, in a faint voice, "Do you know who that girl is?"

"It is my companion, Gratia Kempfield," Alicia answered, with wide-open eyes of surprise; "a charming young person."

Mrs. and Miss Falconer exchanged looks of dismay.

"It cannot be possible that she had thus ventured to impose upon people. She would not *dare*!" cried the elder lady.

"I am at a loss to comprehend you, madam," said Alicia, with dignity.

"My dear young lady," began Mrs. Falconer, with a tender air of maternal concern, "I am sure you cannot be aware what a poisonous asp you are cherishing in your bosom."

"What can you mean, Mrs. Falconer?" demanded Alicia, beginning to be alarmed.

"That girl—that Gratia Kempfield," began Mrs. Falconer, "is——"

"A *murderess*!" hissed out Alberta, completing her mother's sentence, in an awe-stricken whisper.

"It is impossible!" cried Alicia, growing very pale.

"It is not only possible, but it is *true*, as I can prove to you by creditable witnesses," asserted Mrs. Falconer. "My dear, it makes me tremble to think to what hideous dangers you have been exposed. Do not keep her under your roof for another day, if you value your own life and the lives of those around you."



"But I cannot—I *will* not believe this!" said Miss Melworth, looking wistfully from Mrs. Falconer to Alberta.

"You will when you hear the whole story of crime and rapacity," said Alberta. "It was my uncle whom she murdered—a noble, gray-haired old man, whose only fault or folly was that he had become infatuated with her doll-like beauty. Ask her yourself and see if she dares deny it."

As Alberta spoke the waiter knocked at the door.

"Lady Chichester's compliments," he said, obsequiously; "and she will be here directly."

"There!" cried Mrs. Falconer, as if her tidings had confirmation strong. "I knew she would not dare to return. She recognized us, you see."

"But this is all so visionary—so impossible!" cried Alicia, rousing herself with an effort, "that I am sure a word or two of explanation must convince you of the misapprehension under which you have fallen. James"—to the waiter—"ask Miss Kempfield to come to me at once."

Gratia was lying on her bed, with her face hidden among the pillows, when the message was brought to her by James.

"Shall I go to her?" Gratia asked herself, with a sinking heart and a face whose pallor surprised and startled even herself, as she caught its chance reflection in the opposite dressing-glass. "After all, why should I not? What else is there left for me to do? Only, I had learned to love her so dearly, and when *she* casts me off, I shall not have a friend left in the world."

And so, feeling like a lost spirit who wanders by the side of its own grave, Gratia went down to obey Miss Melworth's summons.

As she entered the room, she saw that all she most dreaded had come to pass. Alicia Melworth stood opposite the door, with a look of white, frightened terror on her lovely features, and Alberta Falconer was supporting her, one arm thrown around her waist, while Mrs. Falconer sat, stern and hard as a condemning judge, beyond.



"Gratia !" exclaimed Alicia, "speak to me. Tell me what all this means. Have you kept a secret from me all along?"

Gratia was opening her pale lips to answer, when Alberta Falconer anticipated her.

"A secret—yes," she exclaimed—"a secret of blood and crime! Girl, you dare not deny that you have the crimson stain of my uncle's blood on your hands!"

Alicia turned shuddering away.

"Give me some water, or I shall faint!" she gasped. "No; don't come near me!" as Gratia hurried to her side, and the look of repulsion in her eyes struck like an envenomed poniard to the poor girl's heart.

She turned aside, pale, sick, and trembling, feeling that since Alicia Melworth's love and trust were taken away from her, there was nothing left to hope for more.

"May God forgive you for this day's work!" she murmured, fixing eyes full of sad reproach upon Alberta's haughty face. "Whatever comes of it, remember it was you that drove me to despair!"

"I beg that you will not have the audacity to dare to address yourself to me!" angrily exclaimed Alberta. "Mamma, ring the bell, and have this girl turned out of the house!"

But Gratia had not waited for this crowning indignity. Pale and silent, with her hands pressed tightly over her ice-cold heart, she had glided out of the room.

"Oh, call her back! call her back!" pleaded Alicia, through her tears. "Where is she going? What will she do?"

But Alberta Falconer caught her hands and restrained her when she would have hurried to the door.

"Would you recall a murderess?" she uttered.

The sunset radiance flooded Broadway like a rolling river of gold, as Gratia Kempfield hurried along the stately thoroughfare as if she were flying from some Nemesis which followed ever upon her track.

Coming, at last, to where Broadway branches off westward,



intersected by other streets, she turned to her right hand, for no reason, except that the momentary current of the crowd seemed to carry her in that direction, and kept on, heedless of aching limbs, weary feet, and cold, pinched frame. The river—yes, Gratia smelled the salt gusts. She could hear the floating cakes of ice plash up and down in the turbid rush of the tide. The street she was traversing terminated in a huge, unquarried mass of rock, and just opposite Blackwell's Island loomed up, dark and grizzly. Gratia stood there, her hands uplifted, the bitter wind blowing her curls back from her face, in a tangled mass.

“Why should I fear?” she said aloud, with a wild laugh. “The water is not colder than the hearts of the world, and death is better far than life! Why should I fear?”

---

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### A FIFTH AVENUE DINNER PARTY.

Mrs. Falconer and her daughter had wisely determined to keep the secret of their encounter with Gratia Kempfield from Colonel Falconer and Ida.

“Where would be the use of telling of it, mamma?” said Alberta. “Hugo did always make such a ridiculous fuss about that girl—only think of his scolding us for letting her go away from here, after poor dear Uncle Ralph's death! As if we could have slept peacefully in our beds with her prowling round like a ghost or a midnight assassin! And he would be just as likely now to blame us for telling Miss Melworth the truth about her.”

“I don't see but what you are right, my dear,” the prudent mamma had answered. “And as there is no particular occasion for our making a scene, either with Hugo or Ida, we may as well hold our tongues. That girl seemed to have the art



of bewitching everybody—I don't know for my part how she did it! However, we have done our duty toward Miss Melworth, and that's one thing to be thankful for."

So Mrs. Falconer and Alberta dismissed Gratia Kempfield from their minds as utterly as if she had never had an existence.

And the next thing was to issue cards for an elegant dinner-party in honor of Colonel Falconer's English friends.

The invitations were given and accepted, and the eventful evening arrived. Mrs. Falconer and her daughter were proudly conscious of looking their best.

"I am sorry about Robert," said Mrs. Falconer, with a slightly perturbed look. "He has not been home these two days. I wish Hugo had a little more influence over him, but he seems to fear or care for no one, since Uncle Ralph died. Ralph could always manage him."

"Oh, mamma," said Alberta, indifferently, "he is no worse than all the others in his set. I dare say Bob will settle down after he has sown all his wild oats."

The party from the Arlington Hotel arrived punctually, and the dinner was a very brilliant affair—no one could deny that. Mrs. Falconer's heart swelled with triumph at the evident success of her *recherche* little entertainment.

"There is no knowing what results this may lead to," she told herself, as she watched the interest with which Viscount Barron listened to Alberta's lively chatter, while her eldest son devoted himself, with a host's courteous *abandon*, to the beautiful blonde heiress of Melworth. "And after the way in which Bob has tried me, I'm sure I need some encouragement."

The party of guests were once more gathered round the drawing-room fire. Lady Chichester, who had a delicious soprano voice, had just approached the grand piano to sing a Scotch ballad to the accompaniment of her son, Viscount Barron, and Alicia was admiring the basket of shaded crimson roses which Ida's careful fingers had arranged in a nest of wet moss and



feathery ferns for the center-table, when there was a slight commotion below stairs.

Mrs. Falconer heard it, and the least possible flush flitted across her graciously smiling brow. She knew too well the way in which her youngest son was apt to come home at ten or eleven o'clock, after one of his lengthened carouses, but at the same time she had the utmost possible confidence in the discretion of Scipio, and never turned her head.

A piercing shriek from Alberta made her start up with a cheek blanched to ashen whiteness, and she beheld, borne into the very midst of the festive gathering, on a board, supported by half a dozen rough-looking men, the blood-stained body of Robert Falconer, with a crimson table-cloth thrown over him, and his pale face staring up to the ceiling.

"I've surprised you, mother, haven't I?" he said, with a jarring laugh. "But I've always suspected that it would end just in this way some day. I'm sorry to spoil sport, but they *would* bring me here. Don't touch me, Hugo," as his elder brother approached him with a grave, stern face; "the life is dropping, in big clots, out of me, and I don't know what any one would gain by trying to check it now. They told me, at the first, it was a fatal wound; but I sha'n't peach on the fellow who did it. It was in one of those gambling-house frays, and I don't think he meant to strike so hard. Lay me down somewhere, you blockheads!" to the men, who were looking vaguely at the splendors that surrounded them. "What are you staring at? And, mother, you come close to me; you've always been good to your wild boy. I don't say but that it serves me right, but it's rather hard on *you*. What's the use of that?" as a physician—the very Dr. Hayley who had been summoned so suddenly to the house the morning when Mr. Ralph Miller had been found dead in his room—entered the apartment, with a case of surgical instruments in his hand. "Nobody can help me now, and I won't be tortured. Just a swallow of



brandy, Hugo—there's a deadly feeling round my heart—that's all I need."

As Colonel Falconer held a glass of brandy to his brother's pallid lips, Dr. Hayley stooped to examine the wound as well as he could. It was but a brief ceremonial; and then, straightening himself up again, he slightly nodded his head in answer to Hugo's inquiring look.

"He speaks but too truly," he said, in a low tone. "Your brother, sir, has received his death-wound. He may live two hours, perhaps—certainly not longer."

"Two hours!" echoed Robert, whose ears, preternaturally sharpened, had caught the words that were never intended for them. "Is that all? Well, two hours are long enough for a man to live who feels as if a stream of red-hot coals were pouring through his chest. More brandy, Hugo—more! I've something to tell you before I shut the world's gates behind me, and the strength is all going out of my tongue."

By this time the brilliantly lighted drawing-room was nearly empty. With that delicate good breeding which is a species of instinct, the guests had, one by one, withdrawn.

Mrs. Falconer bent over her son, with a very pale face and hands tightly clasped together, and Hugo supported his head as he lay on the sofa, while Alberta was weeping hysterically, entirely heedless of the gory stains of blood which had besmeared her costly dress. Ida stood, very pale, beside her aunt, and the door-way was blocked by the heads of the curious servants.

As the wretched young man gulped down the fiery liquid which Hugo gave him, a new strength seemed to gush into his veins.

"It's a sorry lookout," he said, with a husky attempt at a laugh. "I never expected it to come quite so soon; but before I die, I must get one thing off my mind. I couldn't sleep quietly in my grave if it lay, like a black weight, on my conscience. I am no coward," he added, slowly. "I have



lived like a man, and I'll die like one ; but *she*—she mustn't carry the blame and the burden any longer."

"Of whom are you speaking, Robert?" his mother asked, tremulously.

"Gratia—little Gratia Kempfield. She is as innocent as a lamb. It was *I* that killed Ralph Miller."

"Robert ! my son ! Robert !"

His mother's voice rose in a shrill scream, and Alberta's head sank on the arm of the chair she sat in.

"It was *I* that killed my Uncle Ralph !" deliberately reiterated Robert Falconer ; "and I'll tell you how it was, if this tightening at my throat will let me. I've carried the awful secret in my heart too long already ; it has dragged me down to hell, and made me the miserable wretch that I am. I came down that night, after Gratia had left my uncle—came softly down, in my slippered feet, and appealed to him for money to release me from the bondage of intolerable debt—disgraceful, dishonorable debt ! I might have known better ; but I think I was a little mad that night. I had been drinking up in my own room until—God help me !—I had neither sense nor reason left. Of course, he refused. He was right enough in that ; but he, too, lost his temper, and threatened to betray me to the world. In a moment of uncontrollable rage I stabbed him to the heart with the pocket-poniard I had gotten into the way of carrying about with me. I didn't mean it. It was some fiend entering into me for the moment. The next instant I would have given all my hopes in this world and the next to recall that blow ; but it was too late—he was dead. Then came all that mummary of the inquest. Nobody suspected me, and I knew they would not. That tray of china on the stairs was what saved me ; yet all the string of evidence about the tray of china was not worth a straw. My mother's dressing-room door stood a little ajar. I did not know but that, late as it was, she might still be moving about ; and so, to avoid passing through the strip of light that shone out across the hall, I swung myself



lightly over the banisters, like a gymnast, and so back again when I returned, leaving that awful thing in the library. I did not even know of the existence of the tray of china, although had I gone down or come up like any one else, I must have knocked it over, and made noise enough to rouse the Seven Sleepers ; and when the next day it was gravely put forward as a reason why I could not possibly have had anything to do with the matter, I smiled grimly to myself to see how neatly my friend and ally, Satan, had shielded his own. More than this—I haven't told the worst of it—Gratia Kempfield had resented my attentions ; she had scorned me openly not a month before, and I had vowed to myself to be revenged on her ; so I let the shadow of suspicion fall on *her*, not only to protect myself, but to carry out the vengeance I had sworn. But a dying man sees things differently, and if ever she will forgive me——” He paused a moment, and then went on, with a choking spasm in his voice : “ I mayn't know it, but—but——”

The blood gushed from his mouth with these words, the last he ever spoke, although he lived in an unconscious state until daybreak.

When Hugo Falconer came out from the chamber in which lay the corpse of his brother, he looked his mother sternly in the face. In the dreary hours of that night-watch she had confessed to him the entire story of the systematic persecution to which she and Alberta had subjected Gratia Kempfield. She had told him, to his boundless surprise, of the meeting, only a few days previous, at the Arlington Hotel, in Miss Melworth's presence. He had listened in silence, but with a terrible lightning of anger in his eyes. He literally dared not speak, lest he should say too much to the woman who, whatever might be the heinousness of her faults, was yet his mother.

He knew all, and that was sufficient. And when the erring spirit of his brother had passed into the presence of Him who is All-Merciful, Hugo came to his mother, and said :



“The next thing, mother—the first and the only thing is to find Gratia. Where is she?”

Mrs. Falconer burst into a weak tempest of sobs and tears.

“For, unless, we find her, and that speedily,” Colonel Falconer went on, in a low, impressive voice, “her blood will surely be upon the hands of you and yours.”

“Hugo, don’t speak so,” wailed Mrs. Falconer. I never meant it!”

“What you meant or did not mean, matters little now,” he said, speaking in his strong self-restraint. “The question is—where is she?”

---

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE SISTERHOOD OF ST. HILDEGARDE.

But Colonel Falconer, determined though he was to sift this mystery to its very foundations, found himself unable to secure any degree of success. For the very next day, even while Robert Falconer’s corpse lay in its coffin, Ida was stricken down with one of the most malignant forms of typhoid fever, and Alberta became the next victim, even while she stood at her little niece’s bedside. When, or how, they could possibly have contracted the seeds of contagion nobody could imagine, but there they lay, fever-flushed and delirious, side by side, while the disease seemed to gain momentarily upon their besieged systems.

The neighbors shrank within themselves; a sort of conviction seemed to have seized upon them that the Falconers were an unlucky family. Acquaintances and friends shunned the possibility of infection. The very servants packed up their few belongings, and crept stealthily away, without stopping even to demand their wages, and Colonel Falconer and his mother found themselves left entirely alone, in this hour of their great-



est emergency, with the single exception of the faithful old colored man, Scipio.

The doctor looked gravely down at his patients.

"I will not say that I do not consider them very ill," he said to Mrs. Falconer, "because that would be misrepresenting matters, but in this disease almost as much depends upon good nursing as on medical prescription. A doctor's drugs can do no good if they are not regularly administered, and nature must be aided in every possible way. It is of the very first importance that you secure a good nurse at once—two if possible."

"But where shall I get them?" Mrs. Falconer asked, despairingly. "People will not come near me. My servants have all fled away, except old Scipio, as if we had the plague in the house."

The doctor looked a little puzzled.

"There is reason in my mother's question," said Colonel Falconer, with a sad smile.

"You are right," said the doctor. "There is a good deal of this fever about just at present, and good nurses, always scarce enough, are in the greatest possible demand. But I'll tell you where I think you could obtain one, if they are obtainable anywhere, and that is at the Sisterhood of St. Hildegarde."

"Sisters of Charity?"

"Something of that sort, and yet not exactly that—a community of noble Protestant women who devote their lives to going about and doing good. Go there and try your luck. Say I sent you, if you please; I have appealed successfully to them more than once."

He penciled the address on one of his professional cards, and handed it to Colonel Falconer.

"Go at once," he said. "There is not an instant's time to lose."

And Hugo Falconer obeyed.

A serene-faced old lady came to him, in response to his request to see the lady in charge. She heard his story with sym-



pathetic interest, and turned her eye-glasses thoughtfully round and round in her hand, as she meditated upon it.

"It is very unfortunate," said she, at last, "but our nurses are all at work in different places, except Sister Leonora, and she is too ill to go out. Yes, it is a great pity—we should like to do something to oblige Dr. Hayley, who has been very good to us in times of necessity. But you see just how it is. Stay, though," she held up one plump, dimpled little hand as her visitant was turning despairingly away, "there's a young person here—she is not exactly one of the sisterhood, but——"

"Oh, that would make no difference," said Colonel Falconer, clutching, as it were, at the straw of hope held out to him.

"But," went on Sister Agnes, mildly, "I think she would make a good nurse, and she is willing to do and dare anything in the service of her Master. I will send her at once."

"Cannot I take her with me, madam?" Colonel Falconer ventured to suggest. "My carriage is at the door, and haste is of the most vital importance."

"I must see and speak to her first," Sister Agnes said. "But if you choose to wait for a few minutes——"

Hugo did wait; but it was of no avail. Sister Agnes came back presently.

"She will come soon," she said. "I thought she would be glad of an opportunity to work. But she cannot accompany you."

And so, much against his will, Colonel Falconer drove home alone.

"You are to send the new nurse up at once, when she comes, Scipio," he said, as he crossed the hall floor to the library.

The new nurse arrived shortly afterward, closely veiled, and dressed in the simple yet not ungraceful garments of the sisterhood of St. Hildegarde. Scipio reverently marshaled her up stairs, and went to tell his master of the new arrival.



"I will go to her at once," said Colonel Falconer, rising.

As he entered the sick-room, where the darkened blinds and the faint odor of disinfectants too plainly proclaimed the presence of disease, a slight figure stood opposite to him, looking all the slihter from the black dress she wore. Her back was toward him as he entered, but she turned, almost at the same instant, and he found himself standing face to face with Gratia Kempfield.

---

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE DARK IS MADE LIGHT.

It is only necessary for us to go back a few days to the frosty February twilight in which Gratia Kempfield fled so wildly from what seemed to her the avenging Nemesis of some hideous fatality. The sullen roar of the ice-freighted East River seemed to her like a friendly, inviting voice; the chill rush of the blast a hand laid kindly on hers, drawing her toward the misty confines of the great unseen.

For an instant she sank rather than knelt on the ice-glazed surface of a huge rock which had rolled to the very edge of the tides, with a dim idea of murmuring some prayer, and uttered aloud the sweet, familiar words:

"'Our Father which art in heaven.'"

Before she could speak the next phrase of her childhood's prayer, a soft, warm hand fell on hers. She started with a low cry, and saw, standing close beside her, a woman dressed in the peculiar black robes of the Sisterhood of St. Hildegarde.

"What is it, my poor child?" Sister Madeline asked, kindly. "Is it sin, or sorrow? Know that neither is beyond the help and pardon of the Father whose name you have just spoken."

Gratia tried to break away from the mild, detaining grasp.

"Let me go!" she cried; "let me die! Only one brief



plunge into those cold waves, and the restless fever will be done forever ! Oh, let me go—it is no kindness to hold me back !”

But Sister Madeline put her arms resolutely about the struggling young girl.

“Nay,” she said ; “I am a woman like yourself. I, too, have lived and suffered, but it is all past. Come with me.”

“Where ?”

“To a place where no one shall question or doubt you—to a home for the homeless, a refuge for those who have no hope left. I do not know what has driven you to this extremity, but if guilt——”

“Oh, it is not that !” Gratia answered, sobbing softly on the kind black-draped shoulder. “I am innocent—indeed, I am innocent. I have tried to do my best, but it is of no avail ; the whole world is leagued against me, and it were better far that I should die !”

“You are not the first one who has said and thought so,” said Sister Madeline, greatly encouraged by the girl’s simple words ; “and yet you, too, will learn in time how kindly the Father cares for us all. Come.”

“But I do not know yet where you are taking me to.”

“I am going to St Hildegarde’s Home, where I live.”

“How did you come here ?”

The sister pointed to a knot of rude shanties at no great distance, clinging, as it would appear, like lichens to the rock.

“Do you see that little cabin to the right, with the stove-pipe chimney coming out of it ?” she said. “There is death there. I have visited the house every day, but I shall visit it no more. Death has come at last. As I came out I saw you crouching by the river-side, and I hurried toward you, lest I should be too late.”

Gratia resisted no longer, but rose and followed Sister Madeline, as she would have unquestioningly followed the beck-



oning hand of a guardian angel. Sister Madeline had come, truly, just in time to save the perishing soul.

In the Sisterhood of St. Hildegarde they found her sufficient employment to make her feel herself no burden on them, and she was fast regaining, not only physical strength, but a healthy, cheerful tone of mental elasticity, under the kindly guardianship of the sisters, when this unexpected call happened to press her into the ranks of active service. She had started and colored when Sister Agnes told her where she was to go, but she had not shrunk.

"All places and people are alike to me now," she had told herself, even while the blood rushed with wild, uneven pulses through her veins at the idea of seeing Hugo Falconer. "Yes, Sister Agnes, I will gladly go."

And although the glad surprise in Colonel Falconer's face, as he looked upon her, was like the very breath of life itself to her hungering heart, she controlled herself by a determined effort, and held up a warning finger.

"Gratia!" he cried. "Oh, Gratia, my lost darling! my recovered treasure!"

"Hush!" she answered, resolutely. "I am not here as Gratia. I am here as the nurse sent by Sister Agnes."

"But you will let me tell you——"

"I will let you tell me nothing until I have wrought the work that I came here to do."

And so he left her, wondering in what school the slight, delicate young girl had learned the lesson of that dignity and self-command, whose influence he himself could not but feel.

But after the long weeks of weary watching, when at last Alberta was sitting up, and Ida, strong, sought to recognize and speak to those around her, Gratia ran down into Colonel Falconer's presence, one day, shawled and veiled.

"You are not going, Gratia," he exclaimed, starting up from his seat at the library table.



"My mission is accomplished," she answered, quietly. "Yes, I am going."

"But you are *not*," he retorted, drawing her to a seat. "I have much to tell you first. Our lips have all been sealed up to this moment, because anything like excitement in the sick-room has been strictly forbidden, and you have been too resolutely faithful a nurse to afford us any other opportunity."

And he told her all that had transpired since that day she had fled from the hotel.

Gratia listened in silence, her large, lovely eyes fixed on the narrator's face, while the faint crimson came and went, fitfully, upon her cheek.

"I knew it must one day be so," she said, in a low, tremulous tone. "I knew God was too just always to let the dark shadow rest upon my life. But, oh! I thought the time would never come!"

"Gratia, do you suppose that I ever, for an instant, believed you to be guilty?"

"I do not know, Colonel Falconer. What else could I suppose?"

"I would have staked my life on your innocence, dearest. Nor is this all I have to tell you, Gratia. Do you remember the day I saw you standing beside the azaleas at Melworth Hall?"

"Yes."

"Well, I have loved you ever since. I have treasured your dear image in my heart. You cannot go and leave me now, Gratia. I want to keep you always by my side—as my darling, cherished wife!"

And that was Hugo Falconer's wooing!

Mrs. Falconer, whose views on many subjects had been changed since the violent death of her youngest and favorite son, received the tidings of Hugo's engagement more graciously than he had imagined she would.

"She is very lovely to be sure," the matron admitted. "I



never saw any one grow and change so in so short a time ; and she has certainly been a great blessing to us all during this fever ; but I did hope, Hugo, that you would admire Miss Melworth."

"So I do," her son answered, smiling brightly, "and all the more because she was kind to Gratia. But I never could love her, even if my heart were not already given to another."

Alberta was genuinely angry, but her indignation was of no avail. Gratia Kempfield was unmistakably queen of the situation—engaged to be married to her brother, and the darling of little Ida's affectionate heart. Alicia Melworth, who had just returned to New York, after a lengthened tour through the United States, came at once to congratulate them.

"I always knew you must have a story, you dark-eyed little wild flower," she said, "because you looked exactly like the heroine of a novel. But why didn't you take me into your confidence? However, I'll forgive you if you'll have a splendid wedding before I go away, with six bride-maids, of whom I am to be the chiefest."

"I would rather be married quietly," pleaded Gratia.

"But you see you can't be," nodded Alicia, with all her old gracious willfulness. "Alberta and I shall manage that for ourselves."

"It is not yet three months since poor Robert died," said Gratia, resolutely. "If I am to be married at all, I shall wait until the year is up."

"And then I shall not be here," said Alicia. "Oh, Gratia, can you not persuade Colonel Falconer to let you be married from Melworth Hall? There is no one who loves you half as well as I do, and it would be so charming."

But Gratia persisted in her own way this time, and Alicia was forced to abandon the cause.

"Well, then, if I am not to be here at the eventful ceremony," said she, "I shall give you my present now, Gratia—



the set of pearls you have clasped so often on my neck and wrists."

She laid the blue velvet case in Gratia's lap, with the great gleaming pearls lying coiled up within, like links of frozen tears.

"Of course I could bring a newer and more stylish set here," she said, "but these are the Melworth pearls, with a history attached to each gem, and I thought you would like them better because I had worn them."

And the light in Gratia's soft, uplifted eyes told her that she was right.

The presents were showered in abundantly as the time of the wedding drew near, for Colonel Falconer was a personage of too much importance in metropolitan society for any neglect to be shown to the girl whom he had chosen to be his wife.

---

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### "MARRIED AT GRACE CHURCH."

The Widow Kempfield, formerly our old friend Miss Almira Bassett, was in New York making a short visit to her friend, Mrs. Keturah Peabody, who kept a millinery store on Eighth avenue.

"There's nothing particular for me to do, now that I've let the farm on shares," said Mrs. Kempfield, with whom it might be supposed that sorrow agreed, she looked so fat and oily and blooming in her rustling black gown and widow's cap. "Poor, dear Ira has left me everything he had in the world, and I don't need to trouble myself pecuniarily."

"To be sure," said Mrs. Peabody, whose own better half had died without leaving anything, because of the simple fact that he had nothing to leave. "And now you're here, Almira, you can lend me a hand with Rebecca's wedding things."



"So she's to be married at last," said the widow, a little acidly—she would rather have indulged herself in elegant leisure while "sponging," as it were, her bread out of poor Mrs. Peabody. "Well, it's time."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peabody, proudly, "she's to be married next month. Julius Disoway's got a situation in an insurance office, and he's taken a floor through on East Forty-fourth street, and furnished it elegant. Would you like to go up and see it this afternoon?"

"Well, I don't mind," said Mrs. Kempfield, indifferently. "It's 'most a pity to stay indoors such a glorious spring day."

"Besides," said Mrs. Peabody, glancing at the clock on the mantel, "I kind o' want to stop in and take a peep at a big wedding to be at Grace Church, at three o'clock, and we shall have time enough if we step lively."

"A wedding, eh?" said Mrs. Kempfield, who had sufficient of the womanly instinct about her to take an interest in all that appertained to the hymeneal altar. "Whose wedding?"

"Well," said Mrs. Peabody, "I heard about it from Alice Hawkes, who used to trim for me, before she got uppish and went to work for Madame Grandillotte. Madame Grandillotte furnishes the hats for the bridegroom's family, and a fat job she's made of it. I don't doubt," Mrs. Peabody added, curiously, "that rich folks will pay any price. It's Colonel Falconer, one of those rich Fifth avenue Falconers, and the young lady, they do say, is the most beautiful creetur the sun ever shone on!"

"In that case," said Mrs. Kempfield, "I'd like to see her."

"And although, of course, my Rebecca's to be married in a plain way at home, yet I never lose a chance of getting an idea. If you can't use it yourself, it comes handy in trade. It's to be a full-dress wedding—the dress and all brought straight from Paris."

"What's the bride's name?" asked Mrs. Kempfield.

"I don't know—some odd-sounding name like it was took



out of a novel. They say the fashionables hain't talked o' nothin' else for a month."

"They can't have much to talk about then," said Mrs. Kempfield, with acerbity.

"It's just in our way," said Mrs. Peabody; "and, as they say a cat may look on a king, I guess there won't be no difficulty about our squeezin' in, though I did hear as any one must present a card to the usher before they could be let in."

"Fiddle!" said Mrs. Kempfield. "I'd like to see any usher that could keep *me* out!"

And, duly attired in the splendors of their choicest wardrobes, the two widows and the bride-expectant started forth on their walk, Mrs. Kempfield little dreaming whose wedding she was about to witness.

It was a bright morning in early spring, and the street in front of Grace Church was blocked in with carriages.

"My! what a squeeze!" said Mrs. Peabody. "I'm afeard we're late, Almiry."

"I'll get in, or I'll know the reason why!" uttered Mrs. Kempfield, between her set teeth, as she pushed herself in front of an elegantly dressed lady.

The usher at the door looked in vain for the requisite square of pasteboard.

"Your card, ma'am, please," he said.

"I've left it to home," said Mrs. Kempfield, confidently pushing past; and the usher could but submit.

"Well, I never!" uttered Mrs. Kempfield, audibly, as she crowded her portly form into one of the reserved seats beyond the mystic silken cord, and beckoned Mrs. Peabody and Rebecca to follow.

One of the officials, shocked and scandalized, was about to interfere, but the usher, who now came up the middle aisle, beckoned him to desist.

"It's some rich old relation, who has money to leave, I



dare say," he whispered. "Nobody else would dare to act so. Let 'em alone—we don't want a scene in the church."

While Mrs. Kempfield was yet staring round her, there was a sudden silence, then an instantaneous turning of heads, and the next moment the wedding march of Mendelssohn rolled out its tumult of rich chords upon the scented air, as the bridal party slowly advanced up the grand aisle.

First the four ushers, then six bride-maids, floating clouds of snowy silks and tulle, with the groomsmen, whose regulation black garments seemed only designed to act as foils, next the bride and groom.

"I can't see her! Plague take that big knot of feathers in front!" cried Almira, in a stage whisper. "Move your head, ma'am, can't you," with a poke of her parasol-end at Mrs. Reginal Chevis, of Madison avenue, who occupied the obnoxious position.

That astonished lady drew herself slightly to one side; but too late; and it was not until the marriage ceremony was over that Mrs. Kempfield had a satisfactory glance. Her eyes, slowly traveling up the bride's figure, and mentally estimating the value of everything she had on, as she glided gracefully down the aisle upon her husband's arm, had at length reached her face.

"Why!" she exclaimed, drawing a quick, short breath that was like a cry; "it's Gratia!"

"Gratia!" echoed Mrs. Peabody, in surprise.

"My step-daughter, Gratia, that ran away from home! It's she, herself, and no other! Well, well! wonders will never cease. And *she* is the bride that half New York is talking about—that is married to the rich Fifth avenue gentleman! My stars alive! I wish, now——"

But she stopped here. Wishes were of no particular avail at this stage of affairs as she was wise enough to know.

When at last they contrived to make their way out, crushed and jostled in the soft, aristocratic tumult of the crowd in which



they felt like denizens of some other and humbler world, the carriages were thundering away down Eleventh street ; the wedding was over.

And Mrs. Kempfield had had the very questionable satisfaction of seeing the brilliant marriage of the step-daughter whom she had so openly hated and contemned.

Verily, Gratia had striven "against wind and tide ;" but she had conquered at last.

[THE END.]



**STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES**  
OF  
**POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,**  
BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

---

**In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.**

---

**No. 1.**

**A STORY OF POWER AND PATHOS.**

---

**THE SENATOR'S BRIDE.**

By Mrs. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,

Author of "Brunette and Blonde," "Lady Gay's Pride," etc.

---

This is a domestic story of deep interest, charmingly written, with vigor and earnestness, and has not a dull scene in it. The author's purpose is to portray nature; she therefore avoids all extravagance, and relies entirely upon her ability to entertain her readers with the presentation of scenes and incidents that never surpass probability, yet are extremely captivating.

The story of "THE SENATOR'S BRIDE" is something more than a work of fiction. It contains a moral that is certain to be impressed upon all who follow the career of the wife who wrecked her happiness because she respected herself too much to deceive her husband.

---

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

Issued in clean, large type, with handsome lithographed cover, and for sale by all Booksellers and Newsdealers; or sent, *postage free*, to any address, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

**STREET & SMITH,**  
**P. O. Box 2734,                      31 Rose St., New York.**



**STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES**  
OF  
POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,  
BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

**No. 2.**  
A VIGOROUS DRAMATIC STORY.

---

**A WEDDED WIDOW;**  
OR,  
**THE LOVE THAT LIVED.**

---

By **T. W. HANSHEW,**

AUTHOR OF

"Young Mrs. Charnleigh," "Beautiful, but Dangerous," etc.

---

An admirably told love story, brisk in action, with well drawn characters, and a novel and ingenious plot.

---

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

---

Issued in clean, large type, with handsome lithographed cover, and for sale by all Booksellers and Newsdealers; or sent, *postage free*, to any address, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

**STREET & SMITH,**  
**P. O. Box 2734.**                      **31 Rose St., New York.**



**STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES**  
OF  
POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,  
BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

**No. 3.**  
An Entrancing Love Story.

---

**VELLA VERNELL;**  
OR,  
AN AMAZING MARRIAGE.

---

By Mrs. SUMNER HAYDEN,  
Author of "Little Goldie," etc.

---

In originality of conception, and artistic skill in the construction and development of plot, the story of "VELLA VERNELL" will compare favorably with the most meritorious works of fiction. The language is graceful and forcible; the style is earnest and captivating; the incidents are novel and dramatic—a series of animated pictures, so very life-like that the reader becomes impressed with their reality; the characters are capitally drawn, and speak and act like sentient beings; while the plot is fresh and ingenious, and evolved with the tact of a master-hand.

---

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

---

Issued in clean, large type, with handsome lithographed cover, and for sale by all Booksellers and Newsdealers; or sent, *postage free*, to any address, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

**STREET & SMITH,**  
P. O. Box 2734. 31 Rose St., New York.



**STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES**  
OF  
POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,  
BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

**No. 4**—(DOUBLE NUMBER).

---

TWO INTENSELY INTERESTING STORIES.

---

**BONNY JEAN;**  
OR,  
**THE CHEST OF GOLD.**

By Mrs. E. BURKE COLLINS,  
Author of "Sir Philip's Wife," "Married for Gold," etc.

A love story of absorbing interest, artistic in construction, and founded on an entrancing plot.

---

**A SEVERE THREAT.**

By Mrs. E. BURKE COLLINS,  
Author of "Bonny Jean," "Sir Philip's Wife," etc.

A story exciting in action, brisk in movement, with several highly wrought dramatic scenes.

---

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

---

For sale by all Booksellers and News Agents, or will be sent, *postage free*, to any address in the United States or Canada, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

**STREET & SMITH,**  
P. O. Box 2734. 31 Rose St., New York.



# STREET & SMITH'S SELECT SERIES

OF

POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,  
BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

---

## **No. 5.**

# BRUNETTE AND BLONDE;

OR,

# THE STRUGGLE FOR A BIRTHRIGHT.

By Mrs. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,

Author of "The Senator's Bride," "A Dreadful Temptation," "The  
Bride of the Tomb," etc.

This is a natural and admirably told story, graceful in diction, with well-drawn characters, and the author's graphic power is evidenced in many dramatic scenes of exciting interest.

---

## **No. 6.**

# A STORMY WEDDING.

By Mrs. MARY E. BRYAN,

Author of "Manch," "Ruth the Outcast," "Bonny and Blue," etc.

A spirited and earnestly written story, with a fresh and ingenious plot, which is so artistically developed that the interest never lags.

---

Both of these books are uniform in size with the others of the series of AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES, with handsome lithographed covers.

**Price, Twenty-five Cents Each.**

They are for sale by every Bookseller and News Agent, or will be sent to any address in the United States or Canada on receipt of price.

STREET & SMITH,

P. O. Box 2734.

31 Rose St., New York.





THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST!

---

STREET AND SMITH'S  
**NEW YORK WEEKLY**  
A JOURNAL OF USEFUL KNOWLEDGE, ROMANCE, AMUSEMENT, &c.

UNANIMOUSLY ACKNOWLEDGED TO BE THE  
**GREATEST STORY and SKETCH PAPER.**

---

FOR SALE BY ALL BOOKSELLERS AND NEWSDEALERS.

BY MAIL, \$3 A YEAR, POSTAGE FREE.

---

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS,  
25-31 Rose Street,  
NEW YORK.



# SECRET SERVICE SERIES,

By "OLD SLEUTH," and others.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

## A THRILLING DETECTIVE STORY.

---

# BRANT ADAMS,

## THE EMPEROR OF DETECTIVES.

By "OLD SLEUTH,"

Author of "Bruce Angelo," "The New York Detective," "Van, the Government Detective," etc.

---

An exciting story of the wonderful exploits of a determined and shrewd detective in solving a perplexing mystery.

Uniform in size with the other novels of the SECRET SERVICE SERIES.

### PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

For sale by all Booksellers and News Agents, or will be sent, *postage free*, to any address in the United States or Canada, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

STREET & SMITH,

P. O. Box 2734.

31 Rose St., New York.



# SECRET SERVICE SERIES,

By "OLD SLEUTH," and others.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

## STRANGE SCENES IN THE GREAT CITY.

---

# BRUCE ANGELO, THE CITY DETECTIVE.

By "OLD SLEUTH,"

Author of "Brant Adams," "The New York Detective," "Van, the Government Detective," etc.

---

A well managed and extremely captivating plot connects the animated and thrilling incidents which crowd every chapter in this eventful story.

Uniform in size with the other novels of the SECRET SERVICE SERIES.

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

For sale by all Booksellers and News Agents, or will be sent, *postage free*, to any address in the United States or Canada, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

STREET & SMITH,

P. O. Box 2734.

31 Rose St., New York.



# SECRET SERVICE SERIES,

By "OLD SLEUTH," and others.

---

In Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

---

A DETECTIVE STORY OF ENTRANCING INTEREST.

---

## VAN, THE GOVERNMENT DETECTIVE; OR, THE BASE METAL COINERS.

By the Author of "Old Sleuth."

---

So engrossed is the reader of this graphically told story that he imagines himself in the company of the brave Detective, an actual witness of the exciting and vivid scenes so dramatically presented.

Uniform in size with the other novels of the SECRET SERVICE SERIES.

**PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.**

For sale by all Booksellers and News Agents, or will be sent, *postage free*, to any address in the United States or Canada, on receipt of price, by the publishers,

STREET & SMITH,

P. O. Box 2734.

31 Rose St., New York.







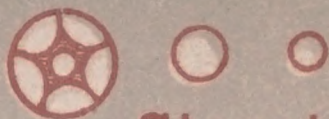
# **\$50,147.00 !**

---

This large sum represents the cost of the reading matter and illustrations that appeared during the past year in Street & Smith's New York Weekly, the best Story and Sketch Paper in the world. For sale by all Booksellers and Newsdealers. \$3.00 a year by mail.

STREET & SMITH,  
31 Rose St.,  
New York.





Street & Smith's Select Series

OF

POPULAR AMERICAN COPYRIGHT STORIES,

BY POPULAR AUTHORS.

Handsome Paper Covers, 25 Cents.

The following Books are now ready :

No. 1—THE SENATOR'S BRIDE.

By MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER.

No. 2—A WEDDED WIDOW; or, The Love that Lived.

By T. W. HANSHEW.

No. 3—VELLA VERNELL; or, An Amazing Marriage.

By MRS. SUMNER HAYDEN,  
Author of "LITTLE GOLDIE."

No. 4—(DOUBLE NUMBER).

BONNY JEAN and A SEVERE THREAT.

By MRS. E. BURKE COLLINS,

No. 5—BRUNETTE AND BLONDE; Or, The Struggle for a Birthright.

By MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,  
Author of "THE SENATOR'S BRIDE," "A DREADFUL TEMPTATION," "THE BRIDE OF  
THE TOMB," ETC.

No. 6—A STORMY WEDDING.

By MRS. MARY E. BRYAN,  
Author of "MANCH," "RUTH, THE OUTCAST," "BONNY AND BLUE," ETC.

PRICE, TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

Issued in clean, large type, with handsome lithographed cover, and for sale by  
all Booksellers and Newsdealers, or sent, postage free, to any address, on receipt  
of price, by the publishers,

STREET & SMITH,

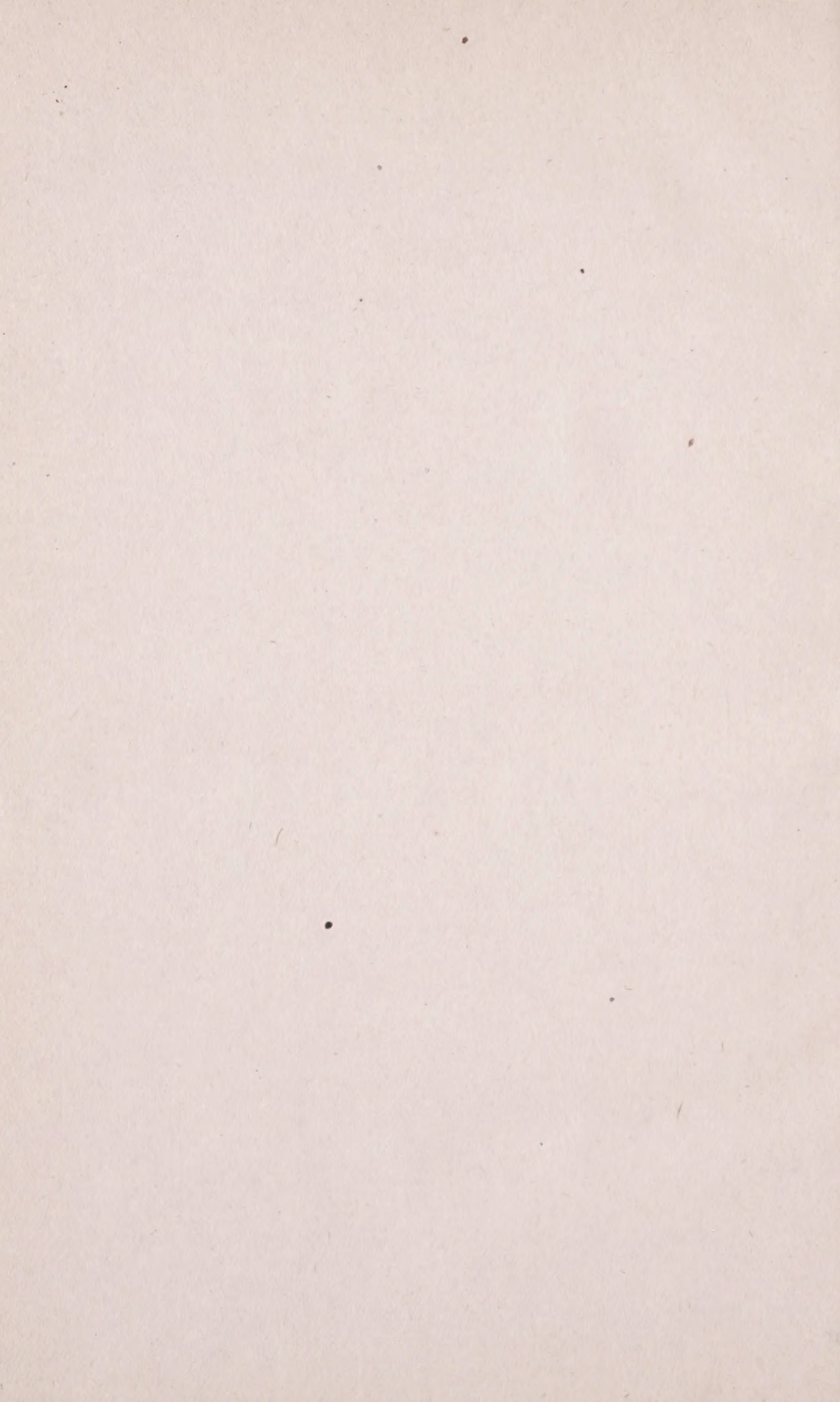
P. O. Box 2734.

31 Rose St., New York.





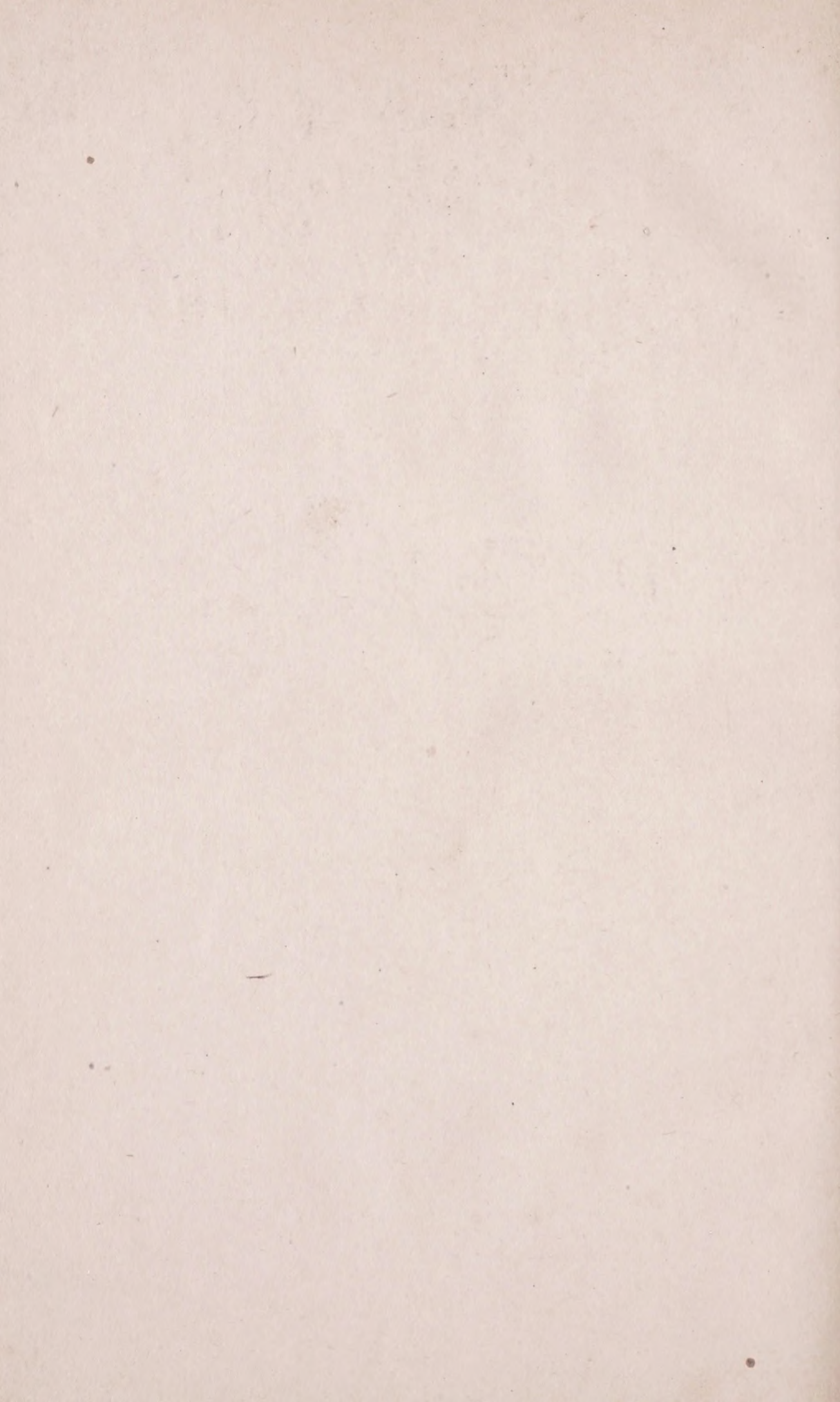


















LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014878701